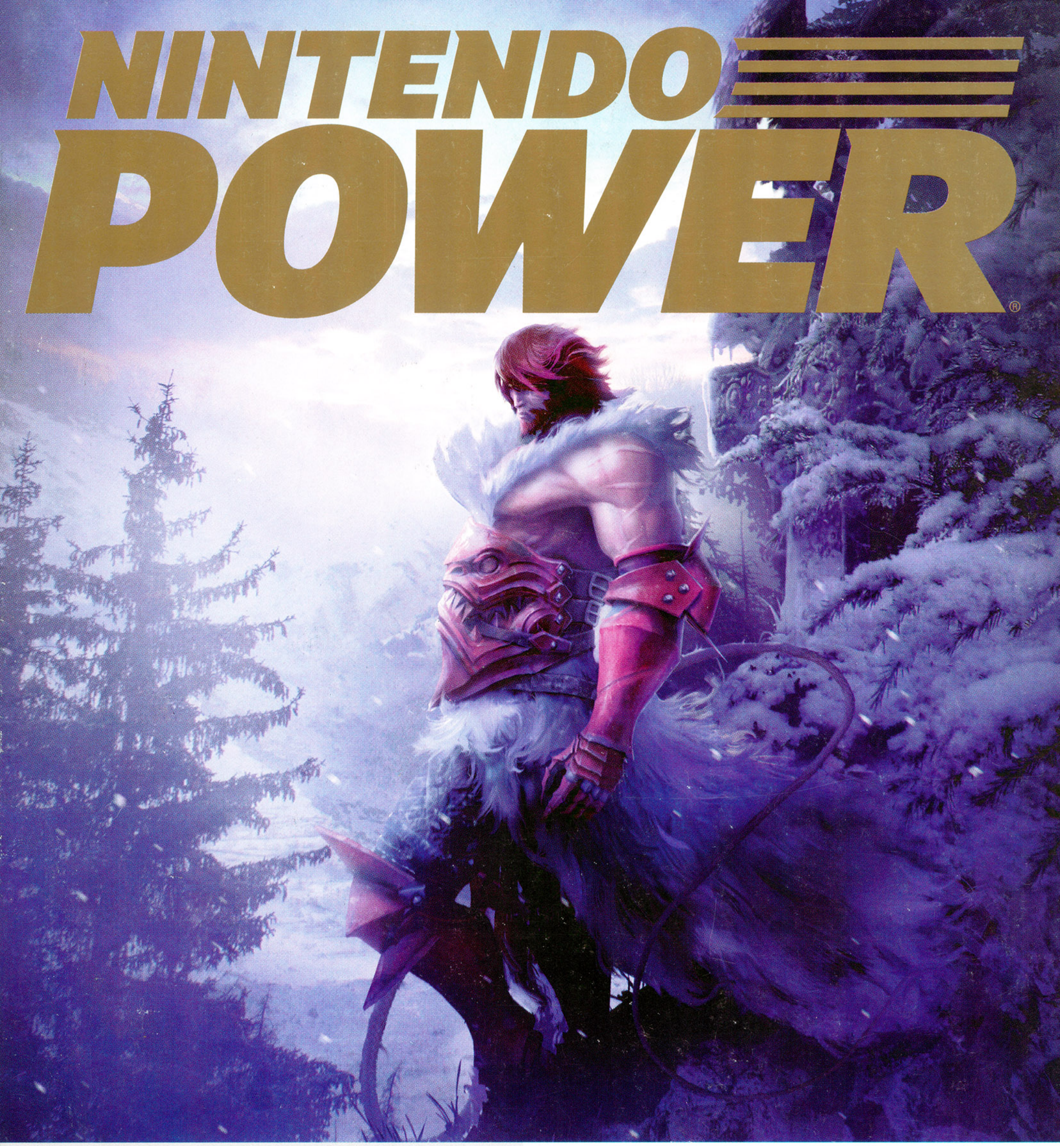
NINTENDO POWER



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate • Pokémon Conquest • The Last Story • New Super Mario Bros. 2 • The Amazing Spider-Man • Wii Essentials • Epic Mickey 2

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Great Moments in Vampire-Slaying History 50
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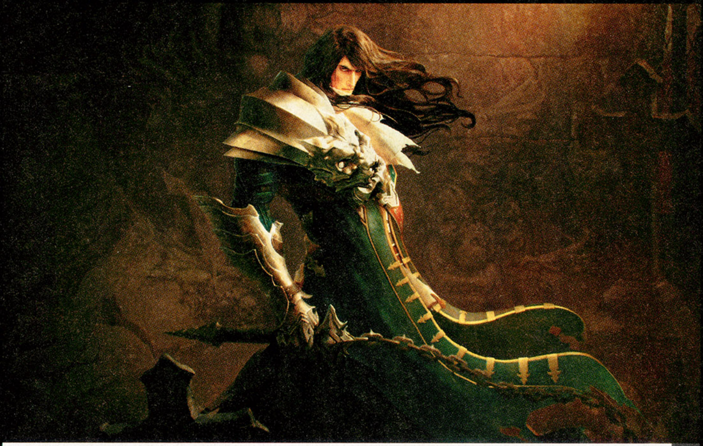
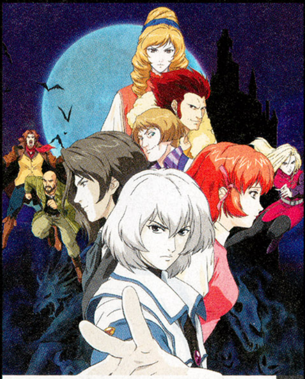
Wii Essentials 58
If you own a Wii console, these are the top 30 games you've gotta have in your collection.

Storied History 66
We go deep inside Wii RPG The Last Story to find out more about its characters and the creative process of bringing them—and the game's universe—to life.



CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW—MIRROR OF FATE 42



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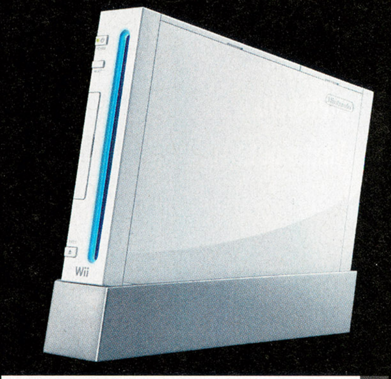

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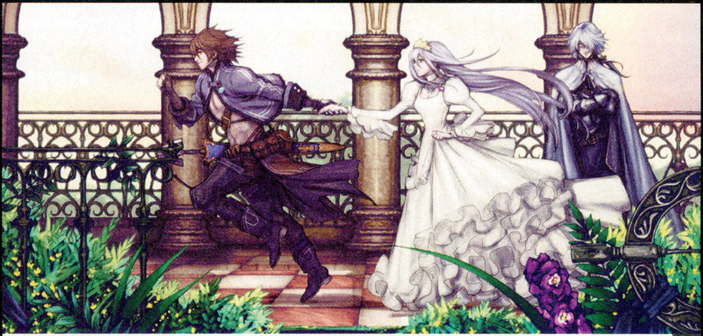

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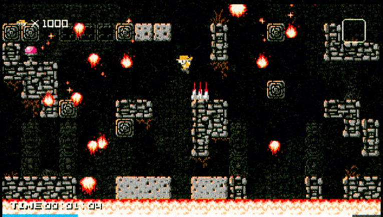

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DW = DSiWARE
GBC = GAME BOY COLOR
N3DS = NINTENDO 3DS
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWARE

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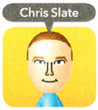
The Wii Era



Reading through our Wii Essentials feature (pg. 58), it really hit me that we're nearing the end of the Wii era, one of the most innovative and defining times in the history of video games. I'm sure the console's low price and large library of great games will continue to tempt more new players to try our favorite hobby, but with the release of the Wii U console mere months away, it's obvious that Nintendo's focus (and likely yours) will shift to the next generation of home-console goodness. When I think about the last six years of Wii gaming, it's clear to me that Wii was exactly the right system at the right time: it sold a new group of people on gaming before casual games exploded on smartphones and Facebook, it tackled the issue of rising costs for both consumers and publishers with gutsy compromises that would not have been accepted had the system launched just a couple of years later, and it gave a much-needed kick in the pants to an industry that was plodding down a boringly predictable path. Wii U will enter at a very different point in our gaming culture, and it remains to be seen if Nintendo can again deliver the perfect platform for the moment. But after the endless number of amazing experiences given to me by my Wii console, I wouldn't dream of betting against that.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

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NINTENDO POWER
POKÉMON CONQUEST

V278 **MAY 2012**

Summer is just about here, and what better way to kick off your vacation than with another batch of letters answered by me, The Hoff? This month's special letter request is an obvious one: what did you think of Nintendo's 2012 E3 showing? Send your responses to the address on page 6.

LETTERS

Reality Check

Have you ever thought about how, in an alternate reality, our favorite gaming stars could be completely different? Maybe Stanley the Bugman was the gorilla-fighter that caught on, and Zelda was the series that laid dormant for more than 20 years, while Pit from Kid Icarus went on to gaming stardom. Perhaps Sega was the company that came out of the 16-bit wars with the advantage, and Mario was a third-party character on their systems. **—HENRY**

According to my alternate-reality self, Stanley the Bugman Party 9 for TurboGrafx is gonna be *huge* this year.

Ask the Oracle

I have read many Legend of Zelda articles, but I haven't seen any mention of or love for Oracle of Ages and Oracle of Seasons (which are two of the most amazing Zelda games, in my opinion). Everyone seems to pretend they don't exist. What are your thoughts on those games? Does everyone hate them? **—LESTER THE UNLIKELY**

Are you kidding? Those games are great! We covered them in Playback all the way back in Vol. 213, and they're represented in our Official Guide to The Legend of Zelda, which is still for sale at nintendopower.com. We'd love to see the games on Virtual Console.

The Sweet Smell of Success

I'm a 35-year-old father of three boys. I'm surrounded by silly jokes of passing gas, burping, and boogers, so I'm pretty immune to them by now. So, after putting the kids to bed, I decided to read my newest issue of Nintendo Power (April 2012). I came to the Power Quiz that I always enjoy taking. After reading the first question, I said to myself, "Oh no," for I knew the answer. Then the second and third questions had the same answer. Due to my job of maintaining a mature dad persona, I cannot repeat the answer, but I will say it totally threw me off guard and I did laugh uncontrollably. My wife asked me what I was laughing at. I handed it over and she gave the same reaction. I guess I'm not so immune to sophomore humor after all. **—MR. HENDRICKS**

Name Game

A couple issues ago my letter was included in the letters section of the magazine. I was thrilled and honored, except for one problem: my name was listed as "Rhinobot." In hindsight, I didn't include a name to use with that message.... **—THE PAULOSOPHER**

This seems like a good time to remind everybody that if you send us a letter without a name, we will provide one for you—most likely inspired by the most obscure video game character we can think of.

I'm really glad that in Vol. 278 you guys picked Super Mario Galaxy as the number-one Mario game. I'll never forget the first time I had to take the plunge and walk off the cliff, hoping the gravity would keep me on the planet. I would say that's the only time I've ever gotten a rush from a video game. **—YOSOYLOGZ**

Ultimate Arguments

OK, I've held back my Mario-related anger for the past year. Unfortunately for you, you just *had* to put an Ultimate Super Mario section in Vol. 278. So let's set the record straight: Super Mario World is and always will be the best Mario game. Ever. **—RJ9000.1**

I have to disagree with your decision to rank New Super Mario Bros. Wii at number 10 on your list of Mario games. I think this game should have been placed in the top five instead. I say that based solely on the fact that my brother and I played this game for hours on end and still do! **—MIKE L.**

Are you crazy!? I just read Volume 278 and was horrified to see that you gave spot 11 to Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins! You should have given 6 Golden Coins something like spot six. I will let you know I recently hired the likes of Mr. T and will sick him on you. **—CHEEZBALL THE ROBOT**

Infidels! How dare you rate my game, Super Mario Bros. 2, as low as number seven in your countdown! It should clearly be number one! I am vastly superior to that loser Bowser. I imprisoned all of Sub-con, and I shall return! **—WART**

Career Counseling

I was just wondering, how did you guys ever get a job as cool as writing for a Nintendo magazine? **—LEGOLINK8**

Oh, it was a lot like getting any other job. We needed solid educations, decent experience, good references, and a willingness to work odd hours. The hard part was getting to the interview, which required us to navigate a network of green pipes full of man-eating Piranha Plants and climb to the top of Nintendo Power HQ while dodging an endless stream of barrels thrown by a love-crazed ape. Naturally, the final part of the hiring process was a dance-off.

Story Time

What ever happened to Cave Story 3D? I went into a store in January to buy a copy and one of the workers said that the game was no longer being made! I loved the original WiiWare version and was looking forward to the handheld version. **—DAGABESTA**

Though Cave Story 3D has been a bit tricky to find, publisher NIS America tells us that major retailers should be restocking the game around the time this issue hits.

Care for Some Punch?

105880
HAGGAR =7
105880
TIME
48
THRASHER
SUBWAY

I love video games, especially beat-'em-up/brawler games. I always thought that it would be cool if a video game company that specializes in that genre would make an ultimate arcade collection of all of the old-school beat-'em-ups that we knew and loved back in the '80s and '90s. **—ISAIAH S.**

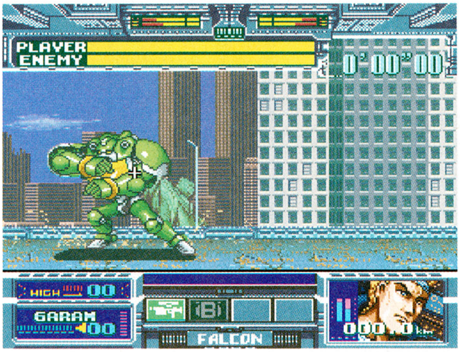
Due to licensing issues, a full collection of such titles isn't very likely. However, the Virtual Console service on Wii already provides access to some of the best titles in the genre. If you want an ultimate brawler collection, Final Fight 1–3, Streets of Rage 1–3, and Double Dragon would be a great place to start!

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

Hey, Hoff! How come you only gave Super Mario Galaxy 2 a 9.5? Mario's stronger, cooler, and more awesome than you! You didn't give Mario that extra .5 for a reason! We deserve to know the truth, Hoffman! Well, I'm waiting. **—SHADOW_THE_WEREHOG**

The Hoff says: Actually, I didn't review Super Mario Galaxy 2. It was reviewed by Chris Slate, and if you had asked me back when the game came out, I would have agreed that it deserved a 10. That's one of the many reasons Slate was launched into space. In retrospect, though, I've realized that the game has one huge, glaring flaw: Lubba. That's right—that portly, creepy, purple Grimace wannabe. He's like the Mario universe's version of Big the Cat, only not as cool or smart. Furthermore, he's clearly only pretending to be a good guy—anyone who tells such horrible jokes must be evil. Due to Lubba's inclusion in the game, Slate probably should have subtracted 47 points from his score.

I'd want Virtual Console Zapper/Super Scope/arcade light-gun games! I've been hungering for these forever! The controller's screen could be used to simulate the Super Scope's sight. **—ALT**



What features would you want to add to the Wii U console?

The one thing I think they could add? Bring back the Power Glove. With today's motion control, it would work even better, and instead of having a number pad, it would have a touch screen like the new controller. I have seen the future, and its name is Power Glove U! **—LUIGITIME1221**

If I could add anything to the Wii U, it would be extended camera functions. It would be awesome to play Just Dance with the camera. My second choice would be stereoscopic 3D images on the touch screen. And last but not least (drum roll, please), lots of connectable accessories. It would be awesome to play Zelda with a motion-sensitive sword, with buttons to get advanced swings. **—ROSCOE GREEN SCREEN**

I want a hidden boxing glove that punches your opponent when they get too braggy when they win a round of Super Smash Bros. **—REX RONAN**

Social networking and online services will both play very important roles for Wii U. For these reasons, I think that the Home menu should essentially become a city that contains various locales that house the games or applications you have on your console. Can you imagine walking into a shop with your Mii character to browse for games to download? Owning your own apartment and pet? Making money (like Play Coins), based on how long you play games, to use for activities around your neighborhood? Sharing good times with friends in their own cities and having them make surprise visits to yours? Or, how about connecting to a worldwide megalopolis where you can join up with others to play games, chat, and share items? Not only would something like this be throwing a total curveball to the way we interact with others, but it would also be done in a way that is very much in line with Nintendo's very own design philosophy of keeping things simple and innovative. Besides, don't we all get tired of staring at a menu all of the time? **—JONATHAN A.**

What I would add to the Wii U is a camera. Oh, they already have that. Well then how about a big screen. They have that too! Then do they have gyro controls? *Yes*!!!?? What doesn't the Wii U have already!? **—RUPPEE INSPECTOR2**

The main thing I'd like to see on the Wii U is a complete overhaul of the Virtual Console. Along with the new features introduced on the N3DS, such as transferring purchases and creating restore points, I would like to see an option to adjust the aspect ratio for standard or widescreen. And it would be really great to see some alternate versions of the Classic Controller, including ones with a rumble feature. **—JUMPMAN AND LADY**

A feature that I would really like to see on the Wii U would be a chocolate-chip-cookie dispenser. I know that a lot of gamers get hungry when playing. Plus, chocolate-chip cookies are amazing! **—KID KLEETS**

Easily the best thing they could add to the Wii U would be the ability to launch nuclear weapons on the touch screen. Global domination is only a tap away! Not like I'd use it or anything.... [Walks away quickly.] **—LINKISGREAT**

PLEASE WRITE US

pulse@nintendopower.com

OR VIA CARRIER PIGEON AT

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Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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THE ULTIMATE HANDHELD...

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What Nintendo fans think, want, and do

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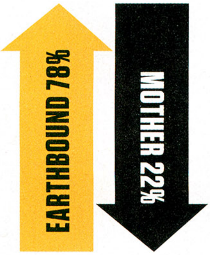
WHAT GAME TITLE IS BETTER?



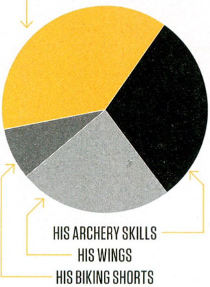
WHAT KIND OF CUSTOM CHARACTERS DO YOU CREATE?

70% **All-new characters**

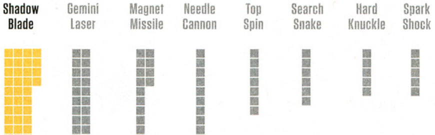
30% **Characters based on real people**

THE COOLEST FEATURE OF PIT FROM THE KID ICARUS SERIES IS...

HIS SENSE OF HUMOR



WHAT IS THE COOLEST WEAPON FROM MEGA MAN 3?

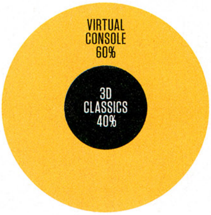


THE SONIC CHARACTER I'M MOST LIKE IS...

TAILS

Tails 34% • Sonic 27% • Knuckles 20% • Dr. Robotnik 9%
Big the Cat 6% • Amy Rose 4%

WHAT TYPE OF RETRO GAMES DO YOU PREFER ON NINTENDO 3DS?



DOES MARIO INTENTIONALLY TRY TO STEAL THE SPOTLIGHT FROM LUIGI?

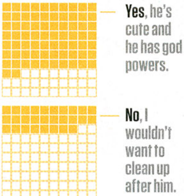
53%

No, it's an accident.

47%

Yes.

WOULD YOU WANT CHIBITERASU (FROM OKAMIDEN) AS A PET?



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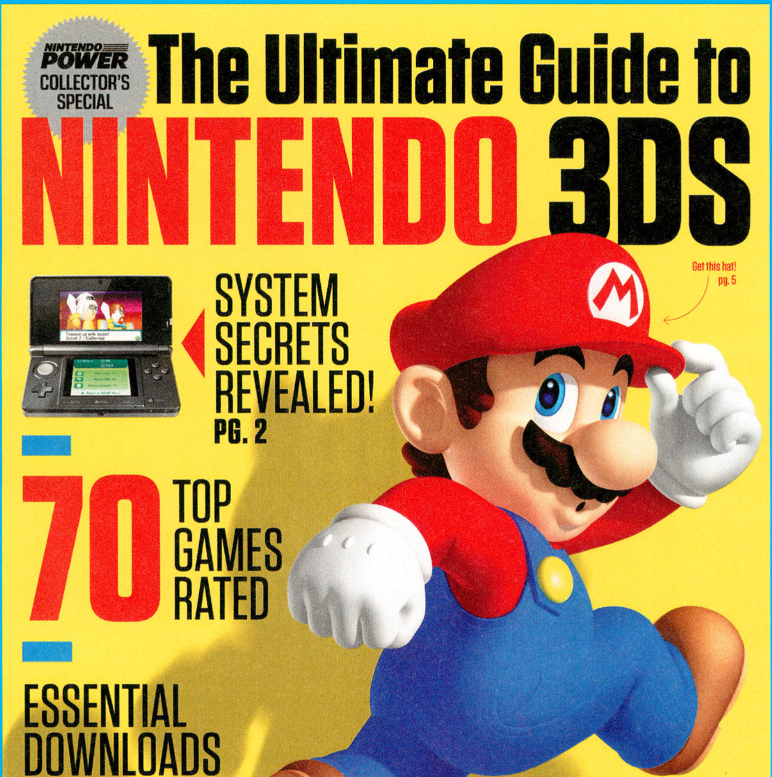
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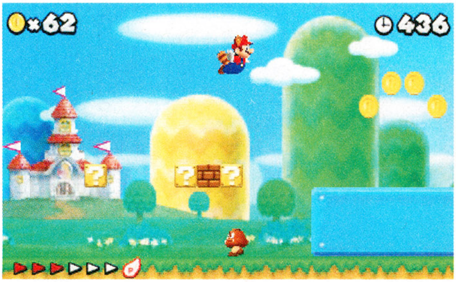
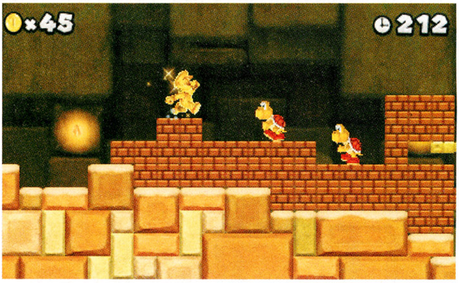




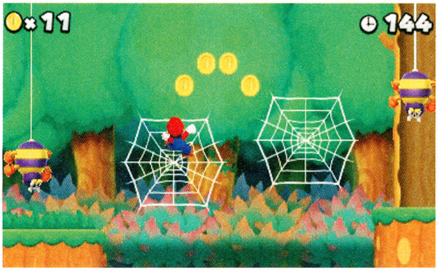
What's Old Is New Again—Again

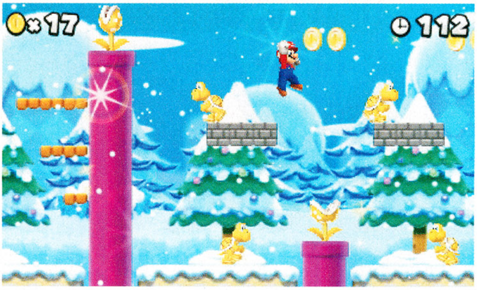
Nintendo offers a glimpse of New Super Mario Bros. 2 and announces a surprisingly imminent launch window.

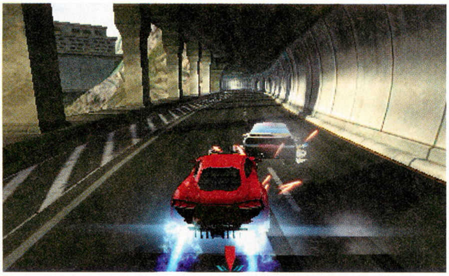
DURING AN INVESTORS' BRIEFING earlier this year, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata announced that a new Mario side-scroller was in development for the Nintendo 3DS handheld. The company had been mum on the subject ever since, but now we've finally got the first screens from the game, along with an official moniker: New Super Mario Bros. 2. (To be clear, this is a sequel to New Super Mario Bros. and *not* a follow-up to Super Mario Bros. 2. Whether that's for better or worse we leave to you.)

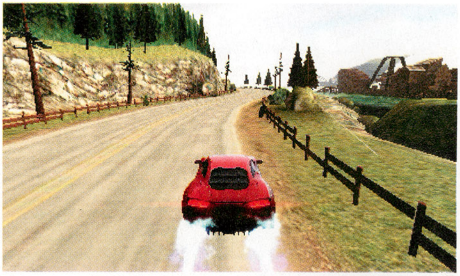
Gameplay details remain scarce, though careful observers will note the return of the P-Wing in one of the screens. As it did in Super Mario Bros. 3, this fan-favorite power-up appears to give Mario the gift of flight. Another screen pictures our beloved plumber in some sort of mysterious gold state.

We'll have much more on New Super Mario Bros. 2 in next month's issue, and with the game set to hit shelves this August, you won't have to wait long to check it out for yourselves. —**STEVE T.**









A-Hunting We Will Go!

Spy Hunter revs up for its long-awaited return.

THE ORIGINAL Spy Hunter, released in arcades in 1983, has great nostalgic cachet among gamers of a certain age. Unfortunately, most follow-ups have done little to gratify that goodwill, and players hungry for modernized updates have learned to crouch defensively at the mention of additions to the franchise.

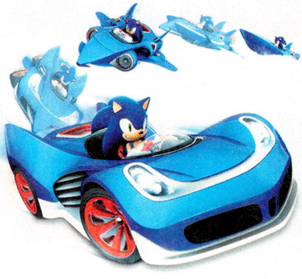
Naturally, this hasn't stopped Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment from teaming with developer TT Fusion to take another crack at Spy Hunter glory. Destined for Nintendo 3DS this fall, the reboot will again cast players as the nameless, supercar-driving agent. It will also feature notable gameplay updates, including a seamlessly transforming vehicle that negotiates off-road and speed-boat stretches. Weapons and gadgets will be upgradeable over the course of the game's missions, and an unmanned aerial-support drone will no doubt spice things up.

Troublingly, we've yet to hear confirmation that the original's iconic music—"The Peter Gunn Theme"—will grace the reboot. —**PATRICK C.**

Transform and Roll Out

Sega favorites hit the track once again in **Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed** for Nintendo 3DS.

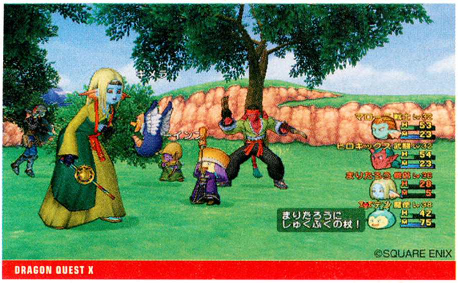
START YOUR ENGINES, kart-racing fans—Sonic the Hedgehog, Amigo the monkey, and a host of Sega's other most notable characters are returning to the racetrack in Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed for the Nintendo 3DS handheld. Developed by Sumo Digital, this sequel to Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing features the same high-adrenaline fun as its predecessor, but adds multiple new playable characters (such as Gilius Thunderhead from Golden Axe and Vyse from Skies of Arcadia Legends) and 16 brand-new courses (including one based on classic shooter Panzer Dragoon). Furthermore, the word *Transformed* in the title isn't just for show; it signifies the fact that during each race your character's vehicle will transform into land-, water-, and air-based forms, allowing you to traverse dynamically changing courses that boast diverse obstacles and terrain. Expect plentiful power-ups and multiplayer action when the game arrives late this year. —**CHRIS H.**



KIRBY™ 20TH ANNIVERSARY
20

PINK TO THE PAST

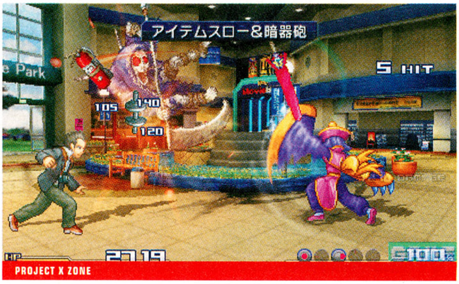
This year marks Kirby's 20th anniversary, and to mark the occasion, Nintendo has announced a "special anniversary software disc" for Wii. The disc will include a number of the pink puffball's previous games, though specifics have not yet been revealed. (Nor has a release date.) Additional anniversary-related activities will be announced later this year.



まりたろうに
しゅくふくの杖！

©SQUARE ENIX

DRAGON QUEST X



PROJECT X ZONE

NEWS *from* JAPAN

Japan's RPG Summer Heats Up

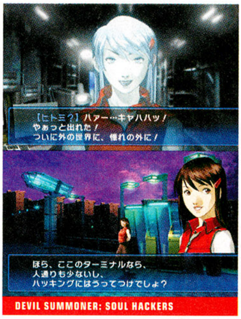
A few new arrivals for N3DS and Wii will keep the RPG party rocking.

LAST MONTH WE ran down the Nintendo 3DS handheld's impressive summer lineup of Fire Emblem: Awakening, Etrian Odyssey IV, and Bravely Default: Flying Fairy. Now a handful of newly announced RPGs are joining the party, all expected by the season's end.

Banpresto has finally revealed the N3DS crossover between Capcom, Sega, and Namco that Nintendo president Satoru Iwata teased back in February. Titled Project X Zone, the game is a strategy RPG in which players control two-character teams of heroes from the companies' various franchises. The roster currently includes teams from the Namco's Tekken, Xenosaga, .hack, and Tales series; Capcom's Street Fighter, Darkstalkers, Resident Evil, Devil May Cry, Dead Rising, and Mega Man series; and Sega's Virtua Fighter, Valkyria Chronicles, Space Channel 5, and Resonance of Fate series, with plenty more to come.

If the concept sounds familiar, it's because Project X Zone is actually part of a loose franchise that included the 2009 Atlus-published DS game Super Robot Taisen OG Saga: Endless Frontier. Like that title, Project X Zone features hand-drawn 2D sprites and backgrounds. That style of art is rarely seen on N3DS, so we're eager to see how it looks in 3D.

Atlus is bringing another Shin Megami Tensei-series remake to N3DS, this time based on a 1997 Saturn game. Devil Summoner: Soul Hackers is a first-person dungeon-crawler set in both a modern Tokyo city and a demon-infested online network. It was years ahead of its time when it was first released, and stood as one of the most popular spinoff titles in the franchise's history. But 15 years is a long time, and it will be interesting to see how the game holds up today. Atlus has created a new animated intro and will be revamping the interface to make for smoother, faster gameplay, but has yet to announce any other substantial changes or additions compared to the original release.



【ヒトミ?】ハアー…キャハハッ！
やぁっと出れた！
ついに外の世界に、憧れの外に！

ほら、ここのターミナルなら、
人通りも少ないし、
ハッキングにはうってつけでしょ？

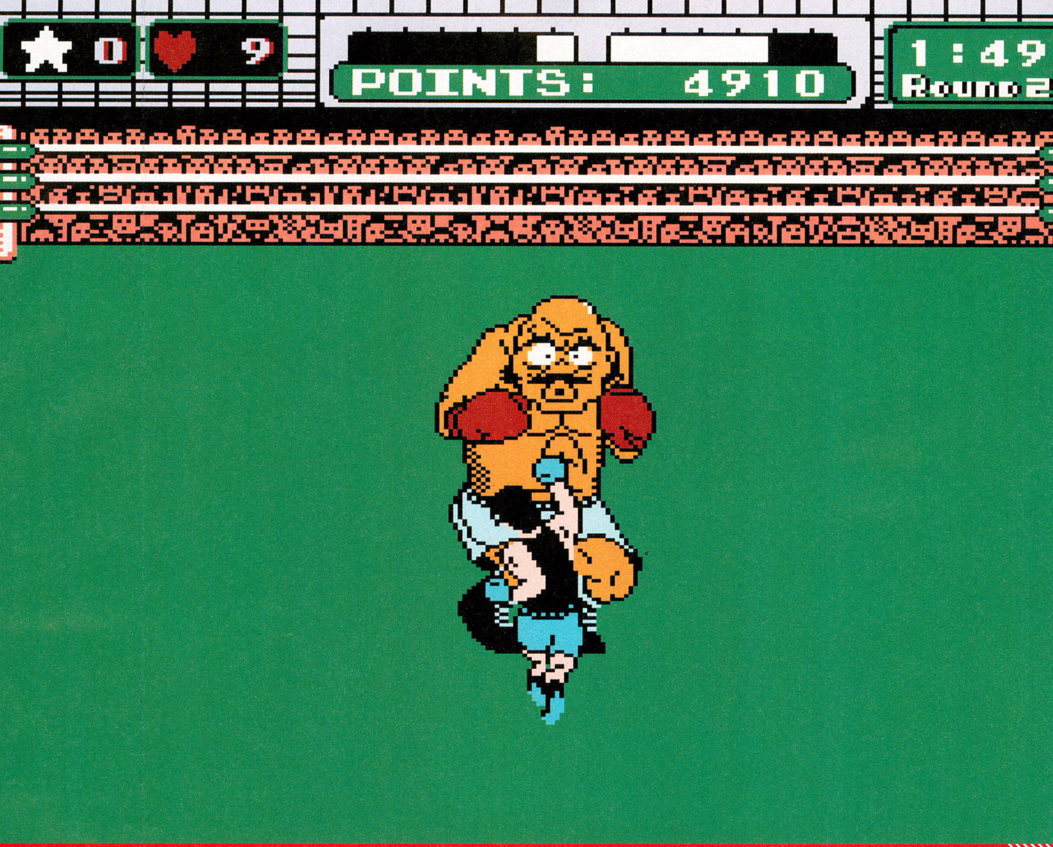
DEVIL SUMMONER: SOUL HACKERS

DEVIL SUMMONER: SOUL HACKERS

Both of these titles will face stiff competition from Dragon Quest X, which has been in beta testing for several months and is set for release on Wii on August 2 in Japan. (A Wii U version is planned for a later debut.) Although Dragon Quest is arguably the most popular third-party franchise in Japan, it faces a tough road converting its mainstream fans to the unfamiliar world of online play. Square Enix's unusual promotional efforts include renting space in shopping malls where trained "instructors" will walk players through the process of starting and playing an MMORPG. **—CASEY L.**

A WINNER IS...
Misleading maps of the city of Belmont, CA.

DODONGO DISLIKES...
The cancellation of La-Mulana for WiiWare.



THAT WAS
AWESOME!

OUR FAVORITE VIDEO GAME MOMENTS

BODY BLOW!

PUNCH-OUT!!, NES, 1987

"Punch-Out!! is all about figuring out and exploiting your opponents' weaknesses. Perhaps the most satisfying part is stopping Bald Bull's devastating Bull Charge with a perfectly timed belly hit." —**CHRIS H.**

STAR POWER

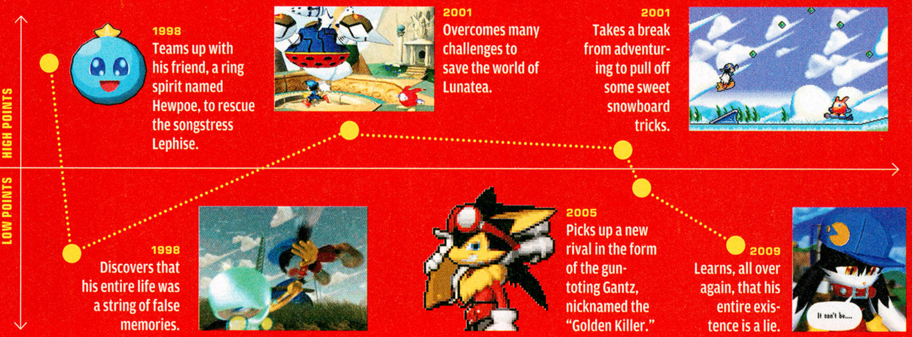
A closer look at the characters we love

FIRST APPEARANCE:
KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE
PLAYSTATION, 1998

Klonoa

We may not know what species he is, but this dream weaver has still earned a special place in our hearts.

CAREER GRAPH



1998
Teams up with his friend, a ring spirit named Hewpoe, to rescue the songstress Lephise.

1998
Discovers that his entire life was a string of false memories.

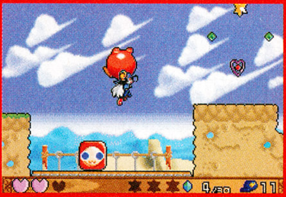
2001
Overcomes many challenges to save the world of Lunatea.

2001
Takes a break from adventuring to pull off some sweet snowboard tricks.

2005
Picks up a new rival in the form of the gun-toting Gantz, nicknamed the "Golden Killer."

2009
Learns, all over again, that his entire existence is a lie.

OUR FAVORITE KLONOA GAMES



Klonoa: Empire of Dreams

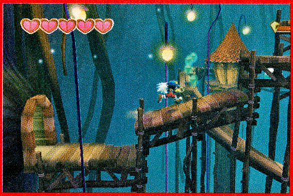
GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2001

After appearing twice on PlayStation systems, Klonoa made his Nintendo debut in this handheld title. Like its console predecessors, Empire of Dreams is a platform game, but it also includes puzzle elements, forcing players to do a bit of planning as they maneuver through each stage.

Klonoa 2: Dream Champ Tournament

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2005

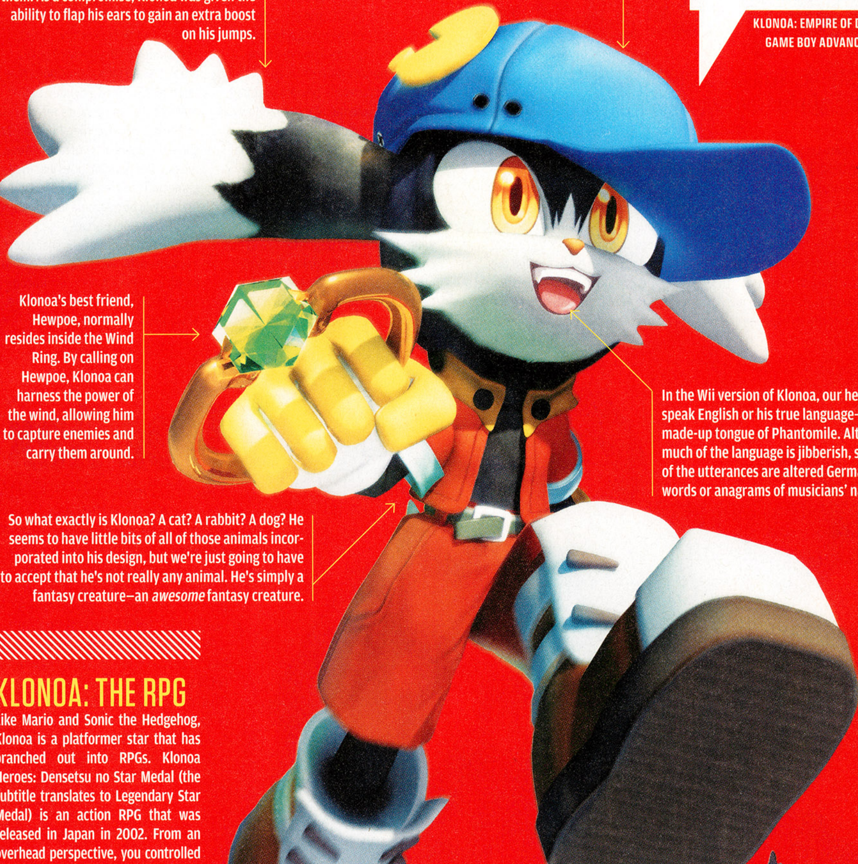
Fans in the US had to wait a while for this game, which was released two and a half years after its Japanese counterpart. It plays much like Empire of Dreams, but with the addition of races against boss characters. Toss other enemies at them to slow them down!



Klonoa

Wii, 2009

This enhanced remake of the original Klonoa game features great graphics, clever level design, and spot-on control. Klonoa's ability to capture enemies and use them as projectiles or as a means to double-jump is very satisfying. Just try not to cry during the bittersweet ending.



Originally, Klonoa's long ears served no useful function. During the first game's development, however, it was discovered that people expected the character to be able to fly with them. As a compromise, Klonoa was given the ability to flap his ears to gain an extra boost on his jumps.

Klonoa doesn't go anywhere without his trademark hat. This chapeau, which is decorated with an image of Pac-Man munching on a dot, proves that Klonoa is a gamer. Or maybe he's just loyal to his creators at Namco.

> "Wahoo!"
>
> KLONOA: EMPIRE OF DREAMS
> GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2001

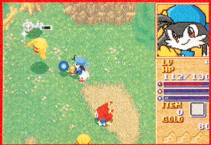
Klonoa's best friend, Hewpoe, normally resides inside the Wind Ring. By calling on Hewpoe, Klonoa can harness the power of the wind, allowing him to capture enemies and carry them around.

In the Wii version of Klonoa, our hero can speak English or his true language—the made-up tongue of Phantomile. Although much of the language is jibberish, some of the utterances are altered German words or anagrams of musicians' names.

So what exactly is Klonoa? A cat? A rabbit? A dog? He seems to have little bits of all of those animals incorporated into his design, but we're just going to have to accept that he's not really any animal. He's simply a fantasy creature—an *awesome* fantasy creature.

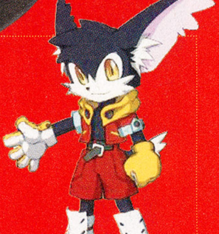
KLONOA: THE RPG

Like Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog, Klonoa is a platformer star that has branched out into RPGs. Klonoa Heroes: Densetsu no Star Medal (the subtitle translates to Legendary Star Medal) is an action RPG that was released in Japan in 2002. From an overhead perspective, you controlled Klonoa, Gantz (from Dream Champ Tournament), or newcomer Pango on a quest to save the land from the nightmare-stealing villain Janga. Each character has two different attacks, and most enemies are vulnerable to only one of them.



THE FAKE KLONOA

When Namco was preparing to release Klonoa on Wii, the company felt that the character needed a redesign for American audiences. This "new" Klonoa wore an outfit that was virtually identical to his previous one, but he ditched his Pac-Man hat and grew a new set of ears that looked like a cross between those of a cat and a bat. Thankfully, Namco listened to the cries of fans that indicated they preferred the classic Klonoa.



Sky Guys

The first in our series of sneak peeks at the new characters (and returning favorites) in Skylanders Giants

THE SKYLANDERS universe is expanding this fall with the release of Skylanders Giants for Wii and Nintendo 3DS. With the new game comes a host of new heroes to collect and control. Over the coming months, Activision is giving us an exclusive early look at the colorful cast.

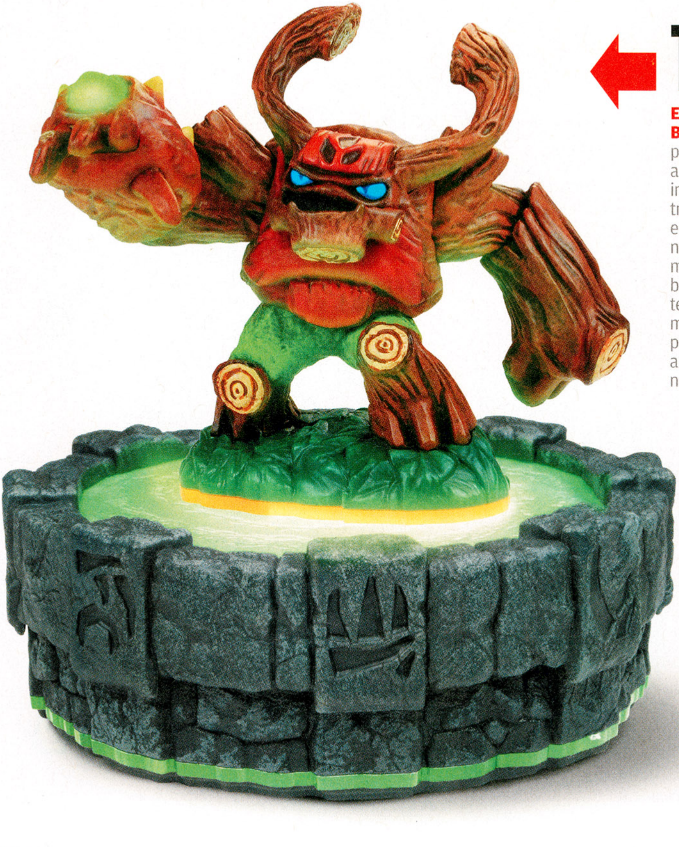
The stars of Skylanders Giants are, of course, the larger-than-life Giants. These colossal characters dwarf the "normal" Skylanders and use their size and strength to solve unique puzzles and smash through obstacles. Skylanders Giants also introduces a group of standard-sized heroes called the LightCore Skylanders—when placed on the Portal of Power, these characters' figures light up, no batteries required. Some of the Giants will also have light features.

New non-Giant Skylanders and fan favorites from Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure fill out the rest of the game's cast. And the classic characters are receiving a few slick upgrades this time around. These Series 2 figures have different poses, upgradeable powers (dubbed Wow Pow), and the ability to follow different upgrade paths. The Series 2 figures even work with the original Skylanders game.

Likewise, your existing Skylanders toy collection is compatible with the latest game; your abilities and upgrades are even carried over. Additionally, the previous Level 10 cap has been raised to Level 15, so your favorite warriors can grow even stronger.

Skylanders Giants will be available in two forms: starter pack and booster pack. A starter pack contains a copy of the game, a Portal of Power, and three figures. The Wii starter pack will include Tree Rex (a Giant), Jet-Vac (a new Skylander), and Cynder (in her Series 2 pose); the N3DS starter pack includes Tree Rex and the Series 2 Cynder, but replaces the Wii version's Jet-Vac with another newcomer, Pop Fizz. For current owners of a Portal of Power, the booster pack includes just the game and the Tree Rex figure. Other figures will be available for purchase individually, or course.

Take a look at the four characters available with the starter packs, and be sure to check back in the upcoming months as we reveal even more Skylanders details.—**PHIL T.**



Tree Rex

Element: Life

Bio: Long before the Giants protected Skylands, Tree Rex was a majestic tree living peacefully in the ancient woods. But this tranquil existence came to an end when the Arkeyans built a nearby factory to produce war machines. After years of his soil being poisoned by the magic and tech waste from the factory, he mutated into who he is now—a powerful Giant who will crush anything that threatens the natural order of things.

Jet-Vac

Element: Air

Bio: Jet-Vac was the greatest, most daring flying ace in all of Windham. He was given his magical wings when he was young, as was the tradition for all Sky Barons. But when his homeland was raided, he chose to sacrifice his wings to a young mother so she could fly her children to safety. This act of nobility caught the attention of Master Eon, who sought out the young Sky Baron and presented him with a gift—a powerful vacuum device that would allow him to soar through the skies once again. Jet-Vac accepted the gift with gratitude, and now daringly fights evil alongside the other Skylanders.

Cynder

Element: Undead

Bio: While just an egg, Cynder was stolen by the henchmen of an evil dragon named Malefor and trained to do his bidding. For years, she spread fear throughout the land until she was freed from the grip of the evil dragon. Having shown a desire to fight for good, Master Eon made Cynder a Skylander. But dark powers still flow through her, and despite her commitment to make amends for the past, most Skylanders try to keep a safe distance...just in case.

Pop Fizz

Element: Magic

Bio: Nobody—even Pop Fizz himself—is quite sure who Pop Fizz was before he became an alchemist. After many years of experimenting with magical potions, his appearance has changed significantly. In fact, no one even knows his original color. But it's common knowledge that he is a little crazy, his experiments are reckless, and the accidents they cause are too numerous to measure. Understandably, he has had a difficult time finding lab partners, or anyone who even wants to be near him. In hopes of making himself more appealing to others, he attempted to create the most effective charm potion ever—but that just turned him into a big, wild, berserker. Or maybe that's how he envisioned the potion working in the first place...

POWER QUIZ

EASY

What is the name of the updated Game Boy Advance system that featured a clamshell design and a backlit screen?

AVERAGE

What two games included the Game Boy Advance Wireless Adapter?

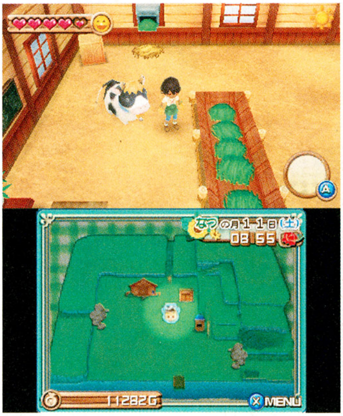
HARDCORE

What is the official color name for the clear purple Game Boy Advance system?

GAME BOY
Nintendo
GAME BOY ADVANCE

ANSWERS

EASY: Game Boy Advance SP; AVERAGE: Pokémon FireRed Version and Pokémon LeafGreen Version; HARDCORE: Glacier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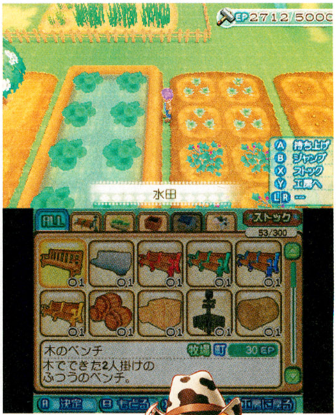
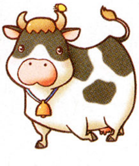
MENU


EP 2712/5000
持ち上げ
ジャンプ
ストック
工房へ
水田
ALL
ストック
53/300
木のベンチ
牧場
30 EP
木でできた2人掛けの
ふつうのベンチ。
決定
戻る
工房に戻る

Farm Fresh

Natsume plows the north forty with **Harvest Moon: A New Beginning** on Nintendo 3DS.



TIME FLIES down on the virtual farm. It's hard to believe 15 years have passed since the very first Harvest Moon debuted on the Super NES in 1997. Nintendo gamers have come back to the series year after year, and the Nintendo 3DS is set to host the latest installment in the series.

Customization is the buzzword in Harvest Moon: A New Beginning, coming out later this year. That means a full-featured farmer-edit mode with options for things like gender, hairstyles, and facial features, plus more flexibility in setting up the farm itself. No longer does the corn field go here and the pasture go there. Players can lay out their land how they like, redecorate their ranch house, spruce up the local village, and otherwise work toward the perfect 3D-agriculture experience. **—DAVID S.**

NINTENDO 3DS

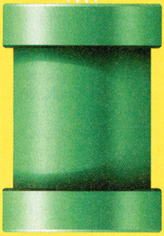
NEW COLOR ALERT!

Midnight Purple–Available Now!

WARP ZONE

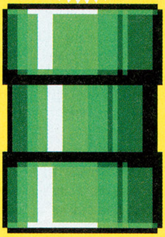
What we were writing about way back when

5 YEARS AGO



After more than a decade of waiting, many Sega fans' wishes came true when NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams made its debut on the cover of Nintendo Power Vol. 216. Although the original NiGHTS into Dreams was one of the most acclaimed titles on the Sega Saturn, many players never thought they'd see a sequel—let alone on Wii. The issue also featured coverage of Super Paper Mario and Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, plus the debut of the Power Profiles section, spotlighting none other than Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto.

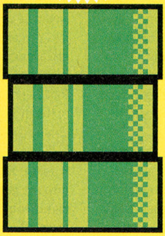
10 YEARS AGO



GAME
GIANTS
Ready for Action!

The smell of big-name previews was in the air in June 2002. Animal Crossing, Super Mario Sunshine, Star Fox Adventures, Metroid Prime, and The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker were just a few of the major GameCube games on the horizon, and Nintendo Power was ready to serve up details on each one. There was plenty of activity on the handheld front, too, with coverage of games such as Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance and Metroid Fusion. The cover, meanwhile, went to GameCube card-based RPG Lost Kingdoms.

20 YEARS AGO



Lemmings are known for mindlessly marching to their doom, but when the classic PC strategy game Lemmings meandered onto the NES, it found itself on the cover of the June 1992 issue of Nintendo Power, supported by an eight-page feature. Many of the other games included in the issue—such as Arcana for Super NES and Dragon Strike for NES—were pretty forgettable, which might explain why so many pages were devoted to Metroid II: Return of Samus even though the title had already been out for several months.

NINTENDO POWER
LEMMINGS
Over The Edge Excitement

ULTIMATE CARD GAMES
11 Classic Games Hearts • Spades Euchre • Canasta Bridge • more
20 Solitaire Games FreeCell • Klondike Golf • Yukon • Spider Pyramid • many more
13 Casino Games Texas Hold'em • Double Flop Hold'em 5-Card Draw • 7-Card Stud • Blackjack Crazy Pineapple • 5 Video Poker • more
Challenge Everyone, Anywhere.
NEW
SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD PLUS
101 Mahjong 202 Solitaire 303 Tangram 101 Picture Puzzles
ALMOST UNLIMITED PLAY!
ULTIMATE PUZZLE GAMES Sudoku Edition
Unlimited puzzles!
9 x 9 Grids 8 x 8 Grids 6 x 6 Grids 4 x 4 Grids Sudoku Solver Difficulty Levels Great 2 Player Modes plus........GAME SHARE!
SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD
101 GAMES FreeCell • Klondike • Golf Pyramid • Yukon • Spider ...and 95 more games!
CAN YOU MASTER THEM ALL?
AVAILABLE FOR IPAD
EVERYONE to TEEN E-T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
AVAILABLE AT
amazon.com Walmart.com
AND OTHER FINE STORES
TELEGAMES®
Web site: www.telegames.com

Causing an Uprising

Director and game designer of **Kid Icarus: Uprising** Masahiro Sakurai converses about keeping things surprising, responds to control-scheme criticisms, and asks for Super Smash Bros. fans' patience.

With a track record that includes both Kirby and Super Smash Bros., Masahiro Sakurai clearly knows a thing or two about making great games. His string of hits continues with his most recent project, Kid Icarus: Uprising, which is easily one of the best titles (maybe *the* best) in the Nintendo 3DS system's library. We chatted with Sakurai to learn more about how all the pieces of this handheld masterpiece came together. —JUSTIN C.

NINTENDO POWER Kid Icarus: Uprising is one of our favorite Nintendo 3DS games, and many people seem to share that sentiment. What do you think of all the critical praise the game has received?

MASAHIRO SAKURAI Thank you very much. This is one of the most gamer-focused titles I've ever made. It's very technical and strategic in nature. Even after seeing the extent to which those aspects were appreciated, I can't help but think about how there was so much more we could have done to make the game even better, and it inspires me to work that much harder in the future.

Kid Icarus: Uprising is very different from your past works. How was the development experience? Was there anything that was more challenging or less challenging than you thought it would be?

Ever since I became an independent developer, I've been working with different development teams for each game, and that has caused all sorts of problems. There's also the fact that we started working with the N3DS when it was in the prototype stage, and its changing specifications forced us to redo major aspects of the game over and over again. Even though we had a very clear idea of what we wanted the game to be, we faced a lot of difficulties in achieving that vision.

The final product contained a lot more content than early looks at the game led us to believe. Why was the decision made to hide the full scope of the game?

Nowadays, players' enjoyment of games is often compromised by spoilers and game footage that is posted online as soon as a game is released—or in particularly egregious cases, even before a game is released. Even in official publicity, publishers prioritize selling the game and are willing to show all the way up to the end to do it. So with this game, I went through a lot to make sure that players would be able to experience the joys of making new and surprising discoveries. For me personally, that sensation of being the first to set foot on uncharted territory was one of the thrills that drew me to video game development.

It seems like a lot of ideas made it into the game, but were there any significant ideas that didn't make the cut?

There were plenty. I might find a use for them somewhere, though, so I'll leave it at that. But to give you one example, there was going to be a casual Arcade mode, where you could enjoy just the aerial battles with a stage-clear structure.

It seems like all of your titles are packed with content. Why is that so important to you, and how do you know when to stop?

I strive for change in my games. In that other fighting-game series I make, I can inspire a variety of different emotions in players by having each match unfold differently in unexpected ways. In order to make this happen, I need lots of content to serve as the seeds of change. With Kid Icarus: Uprising, I applied that same effort to a single-player game.

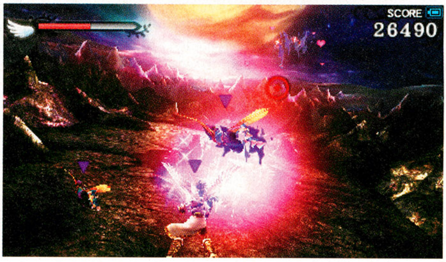
Along those lines, a lot of other publishers put out extra content in the form of DLC. What do you think of that approach?

I welcome DLC that is developed separately as a way to deepen a game experience, like the added content in Fallout 3 that allows players to continue to enjoy the game's world after the ending. Conversely, I'm opposed to the sort of DLC where players have to buy the keys to unlock content that had already been developed. Of course, I understand that there can be a very fine line between the two.

We love how the story is told in this interactive fashion wherein you're actually playing as it unfolds instead of passively watching cut-scenes. Why did you choose to tell the story in this

SCORE
15090
I have to hustle before the power of flight runs out.

SCORE
15830

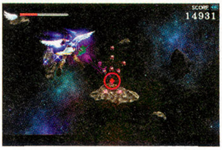


way, and how did it affect your approach to designing the game?
I think that games these days try too hard to tell their stories. In a game, a long cut-scene forces players to wait, and spoils the tempo of the gameplay. The story in Kid Icarus isn't there because I wanted to tell some epic tale, but to allow for dynamic changes in the game state. The idea was to have background conversations that explain the reasons for transitioning from scene to scene. We made the cut-scenes as short as possible, and we knew players would still want to be able to skip them after they'd seen them once.

Kid Icarus: Uprising really nails the humor. When coming up with jokes, how did you decide which fit and which didn't? Why did you decide to make the game so self-aware?
In Japan, we wanted well-paced banter that was infused with the straight man/funny man dynamic of the comedic duos that are popular here. However, that sort of thing can be difficult to bring overseas without major changes. So we told the translators at Nintendo of America that they were free to stray from the meaning of the Japanese version whenever that would lead to more-interesting dialogue.

As for the tone of the game, we based it on the original Kid Icarus. Games like Zelda and Metroid, which released around the same time, had serious worlds in which to adventure. On the other hand, Kid Icarus was much more humorous, with players turning into eggplants, acquiring credit cards, and so on. The tone we ended up with seemed the best way to bring the original game's sense of absurdity into the dialogue of Kid Icarus: Uprising. It still turned serious when we needed it to, but this seemed like the best solution. Another reason for using this tone was to differentiate it from Nintendo's other series.

SCORE
39780



There are a lot of elements pulled from the original Kid Icarus. Did you feel an obligation to include those?
Whenever you're working off of existing titles—and this is as true for Smash Bros. as it is for Kid Icarus—it's essential to show respect for the original work. There may be some people who define "showing respect" as using the exact same game mechanics, but I believe that you can make a respectful follow-up by bringing over the soul of the original game, even if you change the way it plays.

Dark Pit breaks the evil-twin stereotype. Why did you decide to take him in this heroic direction?
That's because Dark Pit isn't really a different individual from Pit, but is actually Pit's reflection—he's Pit himself. That's also why Pit has the instinct to save Dark Pit, even at the risk of his own life.

With both Kid Icarus: Uprising and Super Smash Bros. Brawl, it seems like you made sure to put a lot of effort into ensuring the games have amazing soundtracks. Why do you make the soundtracks such a priority? Why did you decide to go with the composers you did?
Music plays an extremely import role in video games, so once again, we put as much effort into that aspect as possible. We selected the most prominent composers from the large number who worked on Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Even then, we rarely accepted their first submissions, and were very strict about making sure their contributions fit the game.

There's a lot of different kinds of food in Kid Icarus: Uprising and in Super Smash Bros. (Pit can even become a tempura shrimp!) Other than as sustenance, is food something you have particular interest in?
When we went with a Japanese-comic art style, we knew that was something that some people would like and some people wouldn't. Pretty much everything in the game is a matter of individual taste. However, food is something that everyone enjoys. I think that eating is a fundamental source of pleasure. Now that I think about it, eating is a common thread in all my characters, like Kirby.

How did your first experience with online gameplay in Super Smash Bros. Brawl influence how you handled the online multiplayer in this game? What does an online experience need to be great?

SCORE
35561
Wouldn't you like to stay and catch up for a bit? Oh, pretty please?

Kid Icarus had a completely different development team and its online features were structured in a very different way, so we weren't able to fully utilize that past experience. However, that experience did help in various ways. Implementing online multiplayer in Smash Bros. for the first time was certainly an ordeal.

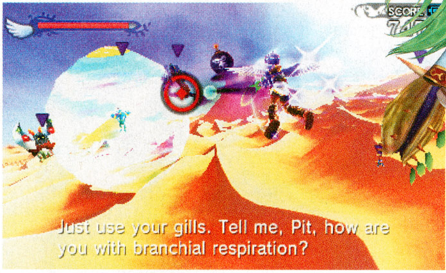
I think it's going to require a lot more research before we can implement a truly exceptional online experience. But I can never quite crack the problem of how to deal with the low transfer rates that are an issue in some homes, and it always makes my head hurt.

Some people have expressed frustration with the game's controls. Was that a concern during the game's development, and why did you ultimately settle on that particular control scheme?
I believe that once players get used to it, this control scheme allows for faster targeting and camera alignment than could be achieved with any external device.

Recently, most games—but particularly first-person shooters—have all played the same, and I think they feel a little stale because of it. When games have massive production values but little innovation, it feels like you're always driving the same car, just with a different interior and on a different track.

I wonder if it just isn't possible to challenge the status quo with new ideas anymore. Personally I believe that gamers are smarter than that, and more adaptable. Attempting new challenges was a theme of this project, and questioning conventional control schemes was a part of that.

The Circle Pad Pro was introduced well into the game's development, but did you consider using it for any purposes other than left-handed controls (aiming the reticle, for example, as in other third-person shooters)?
My team learned about the Circle Pad Pro only when it was officially announced to the public. That barely gave us enough time to implement the left-handed control scheme. Regardless, the game is already using the full power of the N3DS, and there aren't any system resources left over to enable the use of a second analog stick. The release of the Circle Pad Pro has made the question of how to handle game controls a complicated one.



Just use your gills. Tell me, Pit, how are you with branchial respiration?

SCORE
46791

Was including the stand with Kid Icarus: Uprising always part of the plan or was it a response to the feedback you received from early demos?
When the N3DS hardware was still in development, we suggested that Nintendo make the charging cradle be usable as a stand. Nintendo decided against that, so even before Kid Icarus: Uprising was in development, we suggested they make a stand that could be used for playing any game, in addition to our own. We kept asking throughout the development process, and Nintendo was kind enough to design one for us.

Where did the idea for the physical cards come from?
When I first saw the AR Cards that are now included with the Nintendo 3DS, I thought that they were really cool. I wanted Kid Icarus: Uprising to use the full capabilities of the handheld, so I decided to add AR capabilities to the trophy system we already had planned for the game. It wouldn't be much fun if the trophies just floated on top of the cards, so we made it so that they could engage in simple battles.

Why did you include the option to offer hearts to Palutena? Do you really not receive a reward for giving her hearts?
I added that feature when I got the sense that players were feeling more affection toward the characters than what I, as the creator, had anticipated. I've been observing how players react to the feature, and despite being told they won't get anything for it, people seem to enjoy offering lots of hearts to Palutena.

That's true of myself, too. When I got the million-heart reward for clearing every stage on Intensity 9.0, I gave them all to Viridi. Of course, I knew that there wasn't any point to it, but it was still kind of satisfying.

What weapon gem do you personally give to the people that StreetPass with you? What weapon and powers does your Pit usually have equipped?
My favorite weapons vary quite a bit. In the single-player game, I mostly use claws and staves. But in multiplayer, I try to adapt to the situation, and am willing to use anything.

Do you have any future plans for the Kid Icarus series?
I'm still overseeing some Kid Icarus merchandising, but nothing game-related. I don't expect there to be a sequel to Kid Icarus: Uprising. But in another 25 years or so, I would love to see someone else make another Kid Icarus game.

Last year when the next Super Smash Bros. game was announced, you said you were too busy with Kid Icarus to even start coming up with design docs for Smash Bros. Roughly how far into that process are you now that Kid Icarus is done?
We've just taken what you could call the first step of the process. This is the first time I've ever had my next project announced before it's even entered development, and because of that, I fear that players will be forced to wait even longer than they expect to. Please be patient.

With so much content packed in the previous Smash Bros. games, what difficulties do you encounter when creating a new one?
It isn't a matter of "if the next game has 50 characters, that'll be enough." There is a certain charm to games that have huge casts of playable characters, but they tend to have issues with game balance, and it becomes very difficult to fine-tune each character and have them all feel distinctive.... In terms of quantity, we've probably already reached the limit of what's feasible. I think a change of direction may be what's needed.

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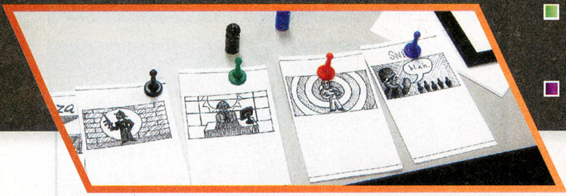

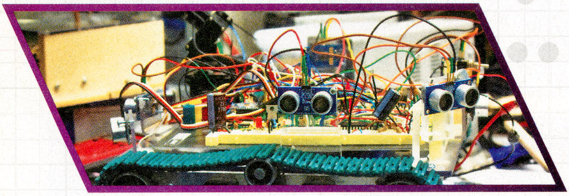

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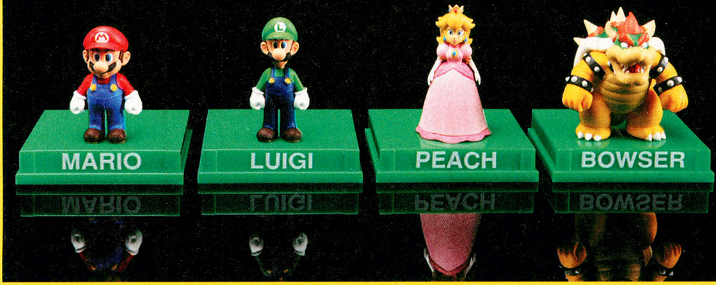


Take a Stand

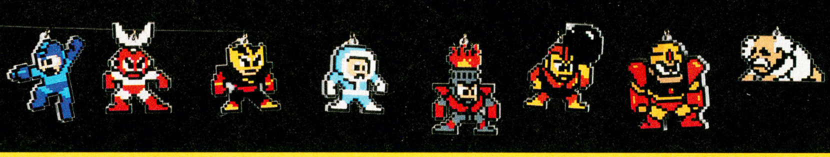
There have been numerous Super Mario figurines released in the last several months, but these 3" versions from Banpresto are arguably the best. Not only do Mario, Luigi, Peach, and Bowser look great, but they come with their own display stands and protective cases.

IV Scores

Complementing the Street Fighter II figures featured last issue, Jazwares has released action-figure two-packs featuring the characters of Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition. You can snag Guile vs. Abel or El Fuerte vs. Seth from your local retailer for about $15 per set.

Keychains that Rock, Man

Our friends overseas can show their love for Mega Man by attaching his pixelated 8-bit form to their keychains or cell phones. The Rockman Dot.Strap Collection Vol. 2 (released only in Japan) includes Mega Man, Cut Man, Elec Man, Ice Man, Fire Man, Bomb Man, Guts Man, Dr. Wily, and more.



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GAME FORECAST

READERS' MOST WANTED

Vote for your favorites at www.nintendopower.com/polls

NINTENDO 3DS

1. Paper Mario*
2. Luigi's Mansion 2
3. Animal Crossing*
4. Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance
5. Disney Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion

Wii

1. Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two
2. The Last Story
3. Skylanders: Giants
4. LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes
5. The Amazing Spider-Man

Wii U

1. Batman: Arkham City
2. Assassin's Creed III
3. Tekken*
4. Darksiders II
5. LEGO City Stories

NINTENDO 3DS

Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!	D3	FALL 12
The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Angler's Club: Ultimate Bass Fishing 3D	D3	2012
Animal Crossing*	Nintendo	TBA
BloodRayne: The Shroud	Majesco	TBA
Boulder Dash-XL 3D	Giant	TBA
Carnival Games Wild West 3D	Take-Two	TBA
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate	Konami	FALL 12
Chevy Camaro: Wild Ride	Storm City	TBA
Contra*	Konami	TBA
Crash-City GP	Rocket	TBA
Dragon Quest*	Square Enix	TBA
Dynasty Warriors*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Disney Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion	Disney	FALL 12
Etrian Odyssey IV	Atlus	TBA
Harvest Moon: A New Beginning	Natsume	2012
Heroes of Ruin	Square Enix	SUM 12
Ice Age: Continental Drift—Arctic Games	Activision	7/12
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance	Square Enix	7/12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	2012
Lion's Pride: Adventures in the Serengeti	Majesco	TBA
Lovely Lisa 3D	Tomy	TBA
Luigi's Mansion 2	Nintendo	2012
Madagascar 3: The Video Game	D3	6/12
Mahjong 3D: Warriors of the Emperor	Giant	TBA
Martha Stewart	Majesco	TBA
Monster 4x4 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
NCIS 3D	Ubisoft	9/12
New Super Mario Bros. 2	Nintendo	8/12
Ninja Gaiden*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Outdoors Unleashed: Africa 3D	Mastiff	2012
Outdoors Unleashed: Alaska 3D	Mastiff	2012
Paper Mario*	Nintendo	TBA
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*	Level-5	TBA
Puzzler World 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure	Sega	7/12
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona*	Atlus	TBA
Skylanders: Giants	Activision	FALL 12
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed	Sega	2012
Spy Hunter	Warner Bros.	FALL 12
Sudoku Premier Edition	Majesco	TBA
Super Black Bass	Rising Star	9/12
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Theatrhythm Final Fantasy	Square Enix	7/12
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Virtue's Last Reward	Aksys	2012
VS-robo	Rocket	TBA
WonderWorld Amusement Park	Majesco	TBA

Wii

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Brave: The Video Game	Disney	SUM 12
Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	Disney	FALL 12
Ice Age: Continental Drift—Arctic Games	Activision	7/12
Karaoke Joysound	Konami	2012
Kirby*	Nintendo	TBA
The Last Story	Xseed	SUM 12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Madagascar 3: The Video Game	D3	6/12
Skylanders: Giants	Activision	FALL 12
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Young Justice: Legacy	Little Orbit	2013

Wii U

Aliens: Colonial Marines	Sega	TBA
Assassin's Creed III	Ubisoft	TBA
Batman: Arkham City	Warner Bros.	TBA
Darksiders II	THQ	TBA
Killer Freaks from Outer Space	Ubisoft	TBA
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	TBA
Metro: Last Light	THQ	TBA
Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Pikmin*	Nintendo	TBA
Rayman Legends	Ubisoft	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Tekken*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Online	Ubisoft	TBA

NINTENDO DS

Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!	D3	FALL 12
The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Brave: The Video Game	Disney	SUM 12
Cradle of Persia	Rising Star	6/12
Ice Age: Continental Drift—Arctic Games	Activision	7/12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Pokémon Black Version 2	Nintendo	FALL 12
Pokémon White Version 2	Nintendo	FALL 12
Sesame Street: Elmo's Musical Monsterpiece	Warner Bros.	TBA
To-Fu Collection	Rising Star	6/12
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Young Justice: Legacy	Little Orbit	2013

RED TEXT = GAMES ADDED THIS MONTH.

* TENTATIVE TITLE

NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE.

ALL NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

You might know **Joshua**.
He loves video games, and he owns enough to know they're not all meant for kids. That's why he reminds his friends (at least the ones that have kids) that they all have **big black letters on the box** to help parents find the ones that are best for their families.

You can learn about those ratings at **ESRB.org**

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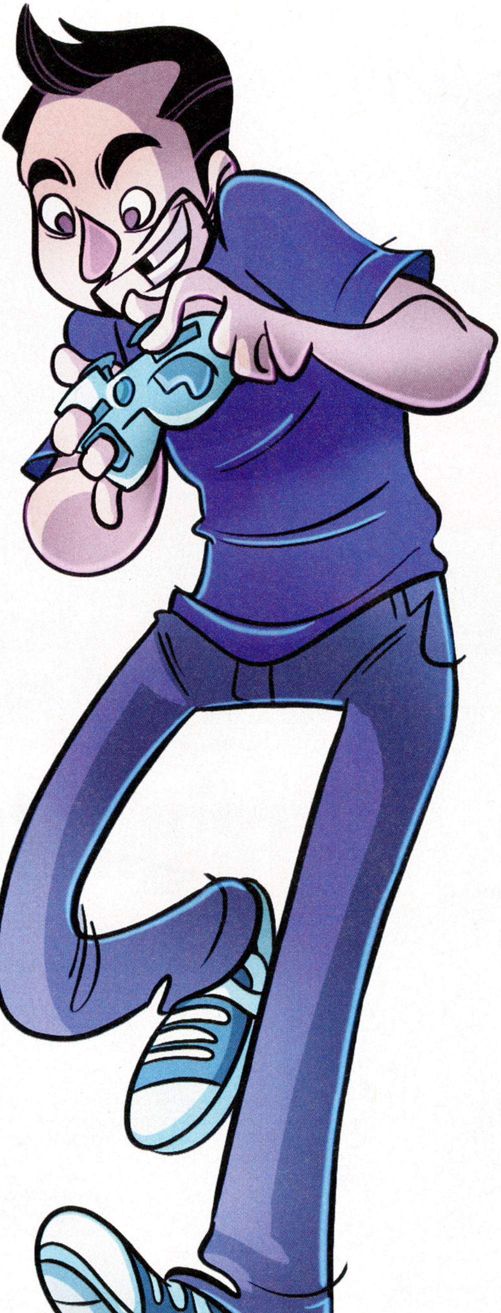
EARLY CHILDHOOD eC CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



DOWNLOAD

IN THIS SECTION

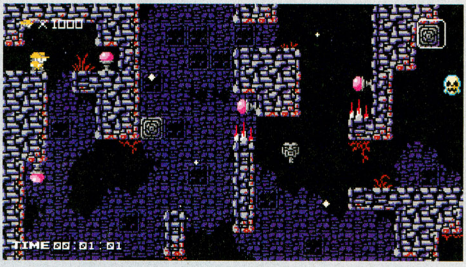
NINTENDO 3DS DOWNLOAD PREVIEW
Aban Hawkins & the 1,001 Spikes

N3DS DOWNLOAD REVIEWS
ARC STYLE: SOCCER 3D
BLOCK FACTORY
COLORS! 3D
KETZAL'S CORRIDORS

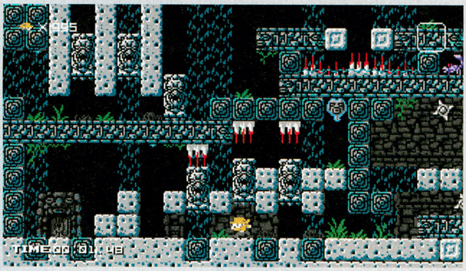
DSIWARE REVIEWS
CHUCK E. CHEESE'S ARCADE ROOM
I MUST RUN!
PENGUIN PATROL

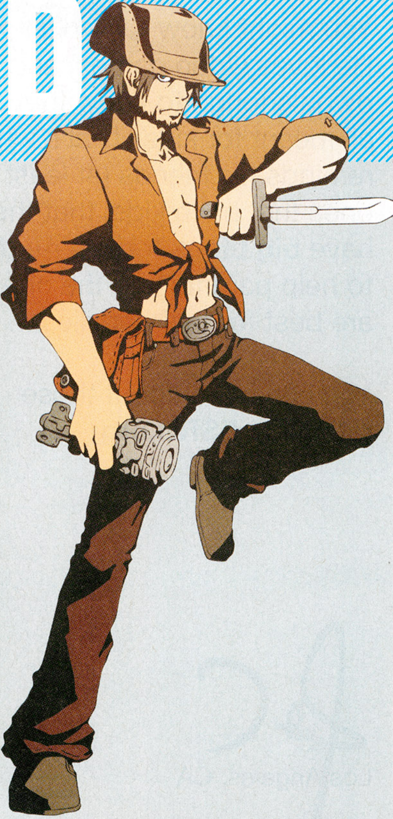
WIIWARE REVIEWS
TNT RACERS

WII VIRTUAL CONSOLE REVIEWS
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS



[Below] We count about 24 deadly spikes in this screenshot. If you can get past those and a mere 977 more, you might just survive the adventure after all!



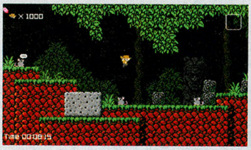


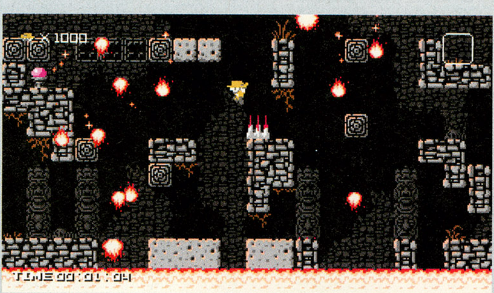
Straight to the Point

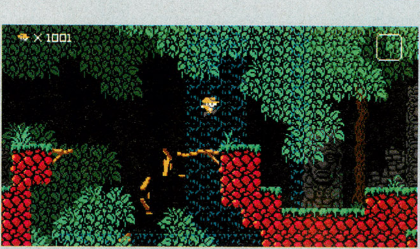
Experience a new breed of retro challenge when Aban Hawkins & the 1,001 Spikes comes to the Nintendo eShop.

WHEN YOU FIRST play Aban Hawkins & the 1,001 Spikes, you will probably die. And then die again. And then die some more. It's fair to say that you will die a lot. This retro-inspired action-platformer is not for the easily frustrated, but if you like your games challenging, intense, and overflowing with 2D peril, you'll definitely want to check this one out when Nicalis brings it to the Nintendo 3DS handheld via the Nintendo eShop later this year.

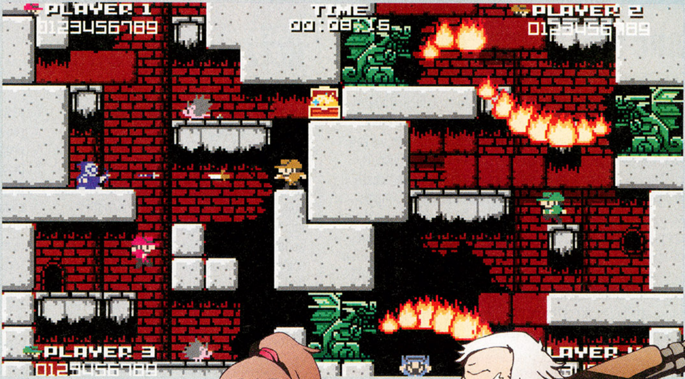
As adventurer Aban Hawkins, your journey through ancient South American ruins sounds fairly simple. Armed with unlimited throwing knives and possessing superior jumping abilities, you must collect the key in each area, then locate and proceed through the exit. But every step could be your last—floors suddenly collapse, enemies rush at you, blocks unexpectedly fall from the ceiling, and statues spit deadly darts (well, except for the ones that spew fire). And that's just the beginning. As you get deeper into the ruins, you'll face bone-crushing boulders, pits of lava, spinning blades, fireballs, and more. Of course, you can't forget about the spikes. The game's title is no joke; there are spike traps everywhere. Some are always visible, some emerge on a timed cycle, and some are activated when







[Below] A four-player mode is one of several enhancements that has been added to the eShop version of Aban Hawkins & the 1,001 Spikes.



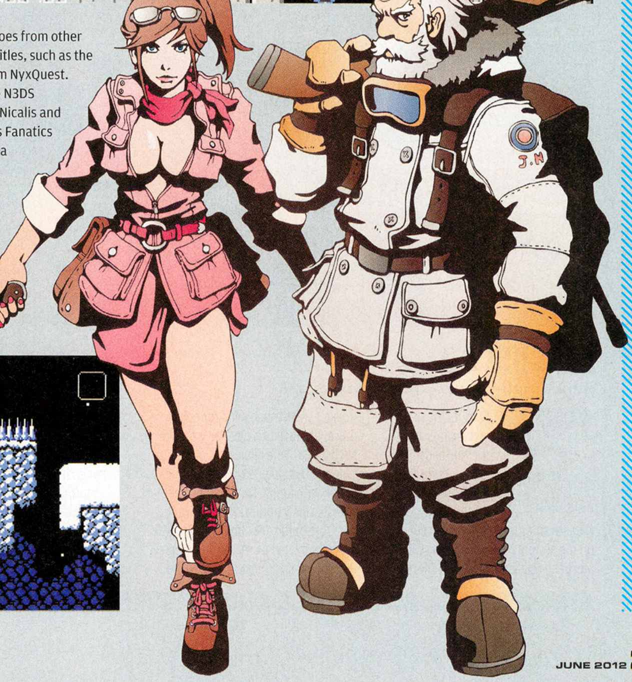
you stay in one place for more than a second, but all of them are lethal. Take one hit from any of the hazards, and it's back to the beginning of the stage; you won't find any midlevel checkpoints here.

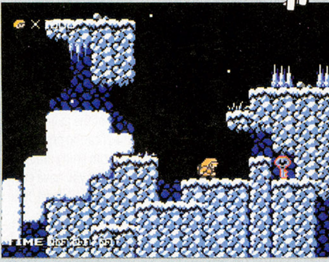
That's not to say that the game is completely without mercy. Aban begins the adventure with roughly a thousand lives, giving you plenty of chances to test your mettle. Sure, you might lose a life to a hidden spike trap or a bottomless pit on your first few attempts through a level, but eventually you'll learn where the hazards are and figure out how to avoid them. It's the ultimate game of trial and error, and once everything clicks and you learn the timing required to get through a level flawlessly, the game promises to become very rewarding.

Though the bulk of Aban Hawkins & the 1,001 Spikes can be experienced in the game's indie-release predecessor (Aban Hawkins & the 1,000 Spikes), the eShop version boasts several brand-new features, including additional stages, prologue and epilogue scenes, online leaderboards, stereoscopic 3D, enhanced music, and a four-player competitive mode. This iteration also adds several unlockable playable characters, including Aban's dad Jim, Aban's sister Tina, and even a few guest heroes from other downloadable titles, such as the angelic Nyx from NyxQuest.

On top of the N3DS eShop release, Nicalis and developer 8Bits Fanatics are working on a downloadable version of the game for Wii U.

—CHRIS H.





EVALUATION STATION

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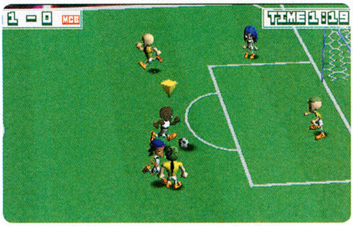


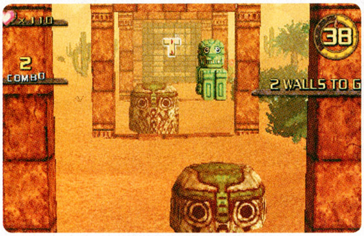
ARC STYLE: SOCCER 3D

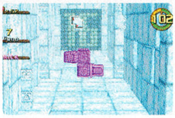
PUBLISHER: ARC SYSTEM WORKS **GENRE:** SPORTS **PRICE:** $6.99

The dumbed-down soccer genre is hard to explain, in that the games keep coming even though no one seems to like them. It's too early to tell if Soccer 3D will buck the trend, but we can safely assert that it exemplifies the genre: flavorless visuals, rudimentary controls, stilted animations, and kick-and-chase AI are here in all their stupefying glory. And the game is impressively dumbed down; you can forget about coordinated plays or set pieces (incredibly, the ball is simply not allowed to go out-of-bounds). Fortunately, it's not all bad; a robust team-creation system allows for highly personalized custom clubs, and multiplayer mercifully attenuates the drag of the AI. But neither of these attributes alters the grim reality that the underlying soccer engine is (ahem) foul. —**PATRICK C.**

Grumble Grumble

N3DS DOWNLOAD





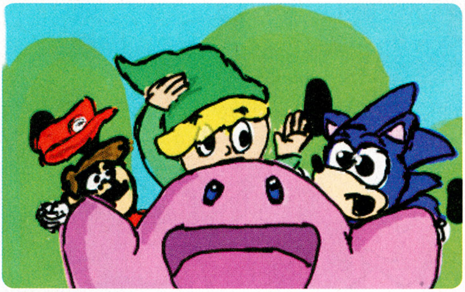
KETZAL'S CORRIDORS

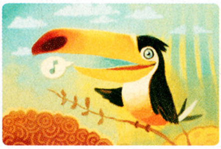
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **GENRE:** PUZZLE **PRICE:** $6.99

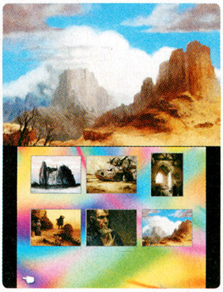
Fans of WiiWare title ThruSpace should have a pretty good idea of what to expect from developer Keys Factory's latest game, Ketzal's Corridors; again your primary goal is to twist, turn, and manipulate Tetris-like blocks through holes in walls. However, Ketzal's Corridors improves upon ThruSpace's barebones approach with far more depth. Regular stages sometimes incorporate obstacles and tricks, and gameplay variations such as matching silhouettes within a time limit to ascend a tower keep things interesting. The game is fleshed out further by its story and Aztec setting, as well as a map screen that comes complete with goal requirements (such as obtaining collectibles) to progress. In addition to the different styles of play featured in the single-player mode, multiplayer is on offer with some unique game types, including one in which two people share a single Nintendo 3DS; one person controls the block's movement while the other rotates it with the face buttons. On the downside, the 3D-oriented controls are a bit complicated (though they become easier to use with practice). Overall, Ketzal's Corridors is both fun and challenging. —**DAVID O.**

Recommended

N3DS DOWNLOAD







COLORS! 3D

PUBLISHER: COLLECTING SMILES **GENRE:** ALTERNATIVE **PRICE:** $6.99

Phil T.'s Pick

With its touch screen and stylus, the Nintendo 3DS is perfect for hosting art programs. Strangely enough, there aren't many to choose from on the system. Now that Colors! 3D has been released, however, there doesn't seem much need for any more, because this one has it all. For such a relatively inexpensive title, Colors! 3D is surprisingly full-featured, with ample brush, color, and transparency options that are suitable for simple doodling but versatile enough to let you create some amazing works of art. If you need a little extra inspiration, you can take advantage of the included coloring pages or draw on the photos that you've taken with your N3DS camera. The greatest asset in Colors! 3D is the provision for creating 3D illustrations by switching between five available layers.

Creating wonderful drawings is somewhat pointless if you can't share them with others, and luckily, Colors! 3D has plenty of social functionality. The Paint with Friends option allows two people to work on a drawing simultaneously, which is always good for a laugh. There is also the ability to upload your drawings to an online gallery, which can be viewed on either the N3DS or the Internet. A particularly slick component of the gallery lets you play back the creation process of each piece, so you can study others' drawing techniques. If you have even a passing interest in art, Colors! 3D is well worth looking into.

Recommended

N3DS DOWNLOAD

BLOCK FACTORY

PUBLISHER: ENJOY GAMING
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: $3.99

Never tire of gagging on hideously unnecessary Tetris clones? Then you're in luck, because Block Factory—at last—empowers you to *make your own.* Choose a vapid theme, define your ho-hum blocks, customize ever so slightly how your all-too-similar blocks behave, and—poof!—you've got a black stain on your soul! Truth be told, if the design engine weren't shallow to the point of precluding genuine creativity, Block Factory would hold great promise. But that isn't the case.

—PATRICK C.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE

SCORE
SMASH MUNCH
TIME
00000
000
TIME UP

CHUCK E. CHEESE'S ARCADE ROOM

PUBLISHER: UFO INTERACTIVE
GENRE: ALTERNATIVE
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Consisting almost entirely of four measly minigames and a lame dress-up activity, Chuck E. Cheese's Arcade Room is incredibly shallow. You can buy "prizes" with the tickets you earn, but their main purpose is to increase the ticket payout for the same lackluster games. —CODY M.

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE

I MUST RUN!

PUBLISHER: GAMELION **GENRE:** PLATFORMER **PRICE:** 200 POINTS/$1.99

It's not the deepest, most innovative game around, but for only $2, I Must Run! provides a decent reflex-based platforming diversion. As your character automatically charges across the screen, it's up to you to jump over hazards, slide under obstacles, and smack objects out of the way. That's as complex as it gets, but fortunately an element of randomness keeps things interesting. On the negative side, the lack of continues in Story mode is pretty harsh. Running out of lives means going all the way back to the beginning, requiring you to play through the easy early levels in order to retry the tough parts. Such a challenge is fine in Endless mode, but in Story mode it's just annoying. —CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

DSiWARE

PENGUIN PATROL

PUBLISHER: GRAB
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

Penguin Patrol is cute, challenging, and visually charming, but it sure gets old fast. Even when multiple types of penguins are introduced, each requiring new strategies, the simple nature of collecting all the critters and heading to the exit grows stale after a few stages. At least the price is low. —CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

WiiWARE

TNT RACERS

PUBLISHER: DTP ENTERTAINMENT **GENRE:** RACING **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS

Although it's classified as a racing game, TNT Racers doesn't conform to the genre's usual formula. Instead, everyone shares the same screen, and the objective is to outscore (and repeatedly destroy) your opponents while looping around a small track. It's pretty fun when you're playing with friends, especially with the chaotic frenzies that ensue while utilizing the unique pickups. However, the game's repetitiveness can make one-player mode feel like a grind. And despite there being four game modes, three of them are more or less the same. Fans of the old Micro Machines franchise will appreciate this title's similarities, but the lack of variation and its high price point makes TNT Racers tough to recommend to anyone else. —CODY M.

Hmmm...

Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE

1UP
G LEO
50000
KO
98
FeiLong
DeeJay

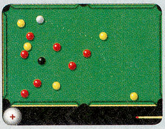
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS

PLATFORM: SEGA GENESIS **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1994
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM **GENRE:** FIGHTING **PRICE:** 800 POINTS

Considering that there are already several versions of Street Fighter II on Virtual Console, do we really need another one? Actually, yes—this edition of the 2D fighting classic has been enhanced with online gameplay, and during our time with the game it worked without a hitch. This version also has a few other modes that its Super NES counterpart (also available on Virtual Console) doesn't, but the graphics and sound are notably inferior. Still, this is a solid buy if you're seeking competition. —CHRIS H.

Recommended

ALSO AVAILABLE



Two additional DSiWare games have been recently released in the Nintendo DSi Shop and the Nintendo eShop. **90's Pool** (200 Points/$1.99) is a traditional 2D billiards simulation. You can play against a friend, challenge three levels of computer opponents, or try to complete all 20 missions of the game's trick-shot campaign mode.... As you might guess from its name, **Anne's Doll Studio: Tokyo Collection** (500 Points/$4.99) allows you to play dress-up with a virtual doll by selecting its outfit, hairstyle, and accessories, and setting it against the background of your choice.

PREVIEWS

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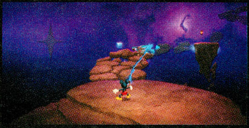
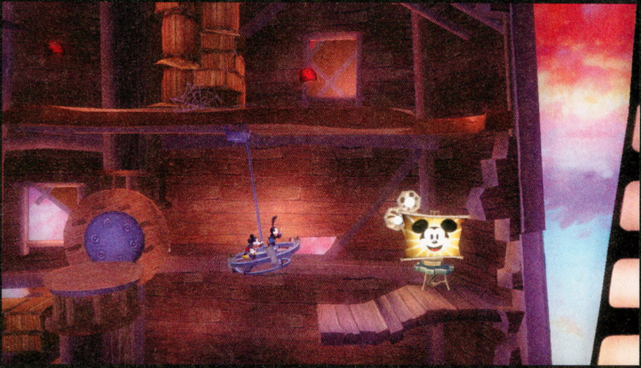
DISNEY EPIC MICKEY 2: THE POWER OF TWO

Journeying even deeper into the Disney vault

DISNEY EPIC MICKEY 2: THE POWER OF TWO promises to be more epic than its predecessor in almost every way. While retaining the platforming action and core play mechanics (using paint to create and thinner to destroy) of the original Epic Mickey, the game boasts two-player cooperative gameplay, improved visuals, full voiceovers, a better camera, and a story that unfolds as a full-blown musical comedy. If you caught our previous coverage of the title, you already know that; you also know that the game kicks off with a return visit to Yen Sid's laboratory, where Mickey regains his magic brush before returning to the forgotten world of Wasteland so he can aid Oswald the Lucky Rabbit and the Mad Doctor (who has apparently reformed after the events of the last game).



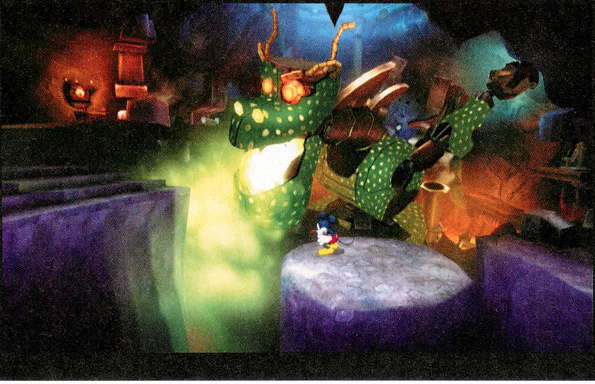
First up on Mickey's to-do list: get reacquainted with Yen Sid's magic brush.



Two heroes are better than one, even in the classic-cartoon-inspired 2D stages.

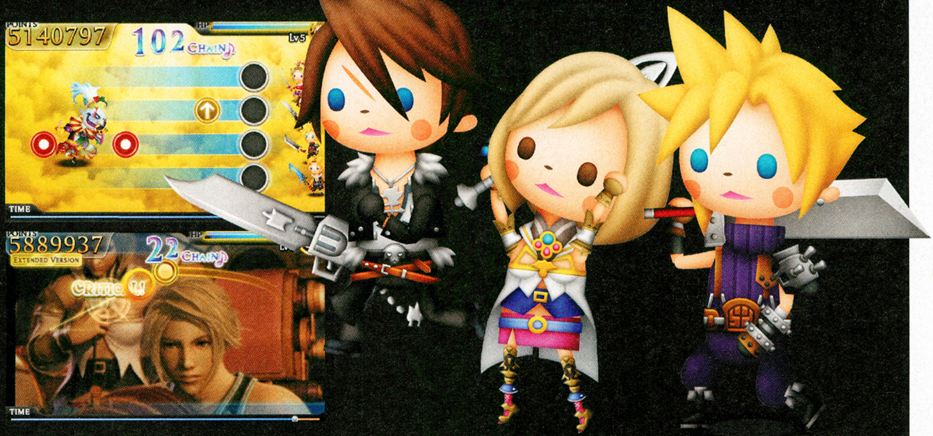
From there, the adventure takes you all over Wasteland. You can expect to return to places from the first game, such as OsTown and Dark Beauty Castle, as well as visit numerous fresh locales, including several all-new 2D stages. In our latest hands-on demonstration of the game, we got to play a 2D level based on the Academy Award–winning 1937 cartoon *The Old Mill*. In this vertically oriented level, you'll climb to the top of a windmill by leaping from numerous wooden platforms and barrels, activating levers, and riding pulley-driven lifts. The stage is essentially split in two by a large wooden shaft, demonstrating one of the game's unique features—in co-op mode (in which the second player controls Oswald), each player can start the 2D stages from a different spot. In this case, each character starts on a different side of the shaft, thus providing a distinct experience for each person as he makes his ascent. (In the horizontal 2D stages, players may appear on separate foreground/background planes.) However, it's often nice to have your partner nearby; if Mickey and Oswald team up, they can obtain otherwise-unreachable collectibles.

The next leg of our journey brought us to Disney Gulch, where we faced one of the game's massive bosses. Surrounded by a pool of lava, the boss was a mechanical dragon inspired by the creature in the 1977 film *Pete's Dragon*. As in the first Epic Mickey, you can devise a battle strategy around using either paint or thinner, but either way, you'll have to avoid the gargantuan robot's flame breath and punishing arm swipes—and eventually a saw-blade tail attack—while spraying it with the substance of your choice. (Oswald, meanwhile, lends a hand by stunning the boss with zaps from his remote control.) After the boss takes enough hits, the lava begins to rise, requiring you to leap to higher ground. In the chamber's upper reaches, you'll have to decide how to finish off the boss: do you cover it in paint to befriend it, or use thinner to erase the supports that hold up the roof, thus crushing your fearsome foe?



We're still barely scratching the surface of Epic Mickey 2, but the more we see, the more convinced we become that it will be a significant leap over its predecessor, and potentially one of the most rewarding experiences yet on Wii. —CHRIS H.

Wii
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **JUNCTION POINT**
RELEASE: **FALL 2012**



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY

Music to your ears; nostalgia for your soul

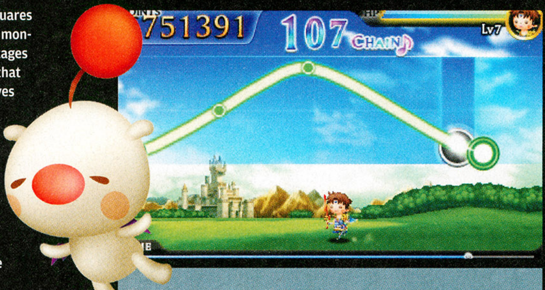
IN THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY, the forces of cosmos and chaos have fallen out of balance. The Music Crystal, which brings harmony to the world, is weak. The only way to restore order is by reliving legendary adventures to collect a magical power known as Rhythmia. OK, it's not the greatest story ever, but who cares? We'll take any excuse we can get to play through interactive versions of some of the best music in the history of video games.

As you know if you read last issue's detailed feature, all 13 mainline Final Fantasy games are represented in Theatrhythm, and for each one you'll tackle field, battle, and event stages. The gameplay in each type of stage is slightly different, but they all require well-timed taps (for red touch triggers), presses (for green hold triggers), and direction-specific swipes (for yellow slide triggers) with the stylus. Field stages feature a single row of onscreen cues and emphasize dragging your cursor up and down to match wavy patterns that frequently appear; battle stages call for you to react to four rows of cues as your party of heroes squares off against enemy monsters; and event stages focus on a cursor that automatically moves around and overlaps the cues while story scenes unfold in the background.

Once you've collected enough Rhythmia you'll be able to defeat the embodiment of chaos and restore the Music Crystal, but there's much, much more to the game than that. You can level up your heroes, equip them with abilities and items, and earn loads of unlockables: collectible cards, extra characters, movies, bonus songs, ultrachallenging Dark Note mixes, and more. There's also plentiful downloadable content on tap, ensuring that rhythm fans and RPG enthusiasts alike will be tapping their toes for weeks on end.

—**CHRIS H.**

N3DS
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **INDIESZERO**
RELEASE: **JULY 2012**



ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy contains more than 70 beloved tunes from 13 games, including the examples listed here. If you recognize these tracks by only their names, give yourself a pat on the back!

FINAL FANTASY
"Main Theme"
"Battle"
"Opening Theme"

FINAL FANTASY VI
"Terra's Theme"
"The Decisive Battle"
"Celes's Theme"

FINAL FANTASY VIII
"Blue Fields"
"Waltz for the Moon"
"The Man with the Machine Gun"

FINAL FANTASY XII
"Giza Plains"
"Clash of Swords"
"Theme of the Empire"

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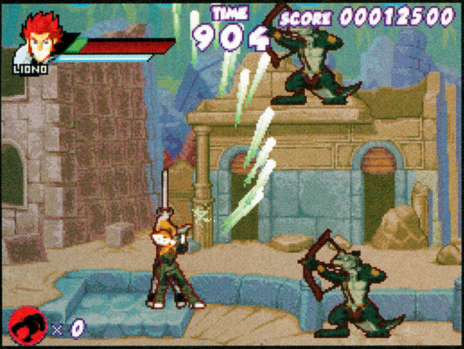
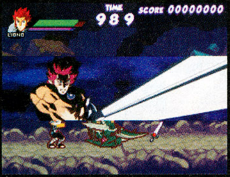
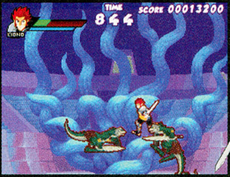
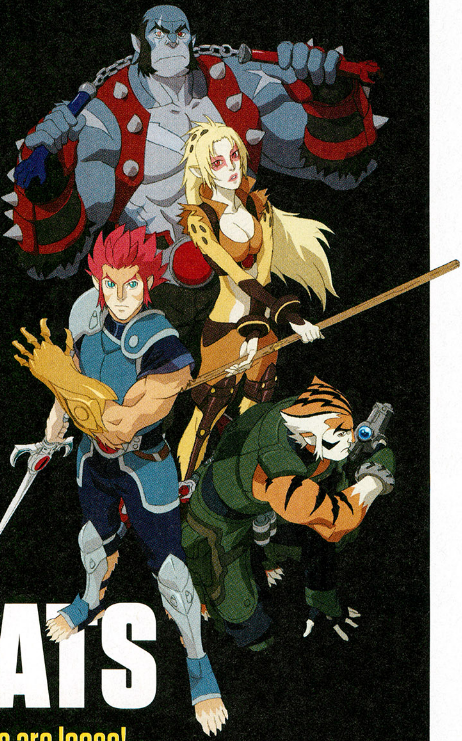








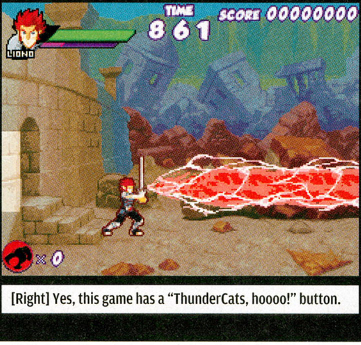
THUNDERCATS

Feel the magic, hear the roar—ThunderCats are loose!

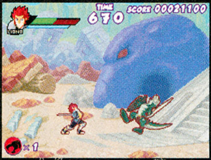
RETELLING THE EVENTS from the current *ThunderCats* show on Cartoon Network (a rebooted, modernized version of the original '80s program), ThunderCats for the Nintendo DS puts you in the role of Lion-O, the young king of Thundera who fights against Mumm-Ra the Ever-Living and his army of lizards. This 2D side-scrolling action game plays similarly to the Naruto: Ninja Council titles for Game Boy Advance and DS (which comes as no surprise given that those were also developed by Aspect Digital), meaning it has a fairly simple control scheme: you move right and left with the Control Pad, jump with B, and swing the Sword of Omens with A. As you hack and slash foes, you fill up a gauge right under your health bar. Tap the sword icon on the touch screen (or press Y) once this gauge is full, and Lion-O yells his famous "ThunderCats, hoooo!" rallying cry and unleashes a massive beam of energy from the Sword of Omens that devastates all the baddies in its path.

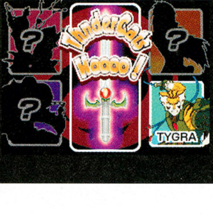
Of course, as in the show, Lion-O isn't alone in his travels; Tygra, Cheetara, Panthro, WilyKit, and WilyKat accompany him as support characters. By tapping on their respective icons on the touch screen (or by selecting the character with R or L and then pressing X), you can have Tygra unload a screen-filling hail of bullets, for example, or you can acquire health-replenishing foodstuffs from WilyKit and WilyKat. However, calling forth your allies consumes orbs emblazoned with the ThunderCats symbol. These collectibles can be hard to come by—like most of the other pickups in this title, they usually drop randomly from defeated enemies—so it's best to refrain from summoning your pals until the boss battles, such as when you face off with Mumm-Ra's right-hand-lizard, Slithe, or with the enormous sea-anemone-like Ramlak. —JUSTIN C.

DS
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **ASPECT DIGITAL**
RELEASE: **FALL 2012**



[Right] Yes, this game has a "ThunderCats, hoooo!" button.





This is **Richard**. He knows it's his job to teach his son **Scotty** what this whole gaming thing is about. The age rating helps him **pick the right games**, but being a good dad means he always wants to know more.

That's exactly what the **ESRB's rating summaries** are for.

Search for a game's rating summary at **ESRB.org**.

Rich H.
Lafayette, IN

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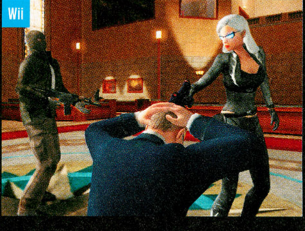
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

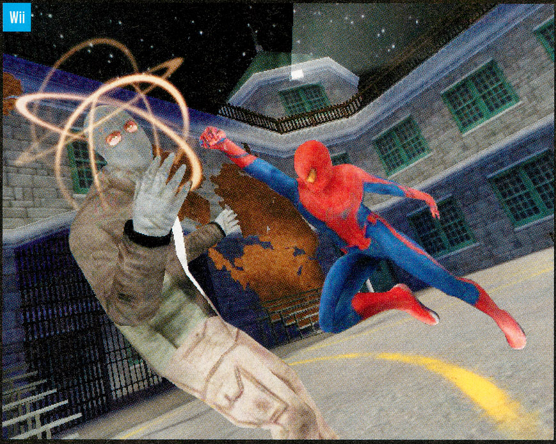
Back in the swing of things

[Below] Although Felicia Hardy is one of Spider-Man's allies in the comics, she clearly isn't one in this game (nor is she Black Cat).

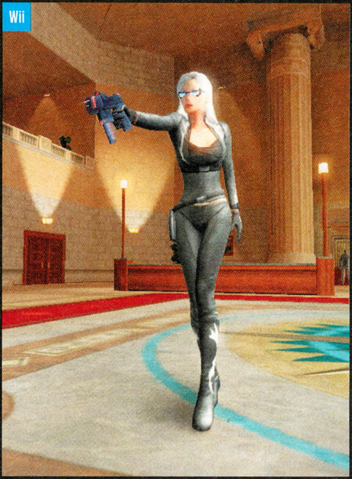


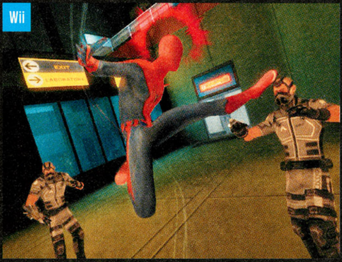
LICENSED GAMES GENERALLY serve as either side stories to or reenactments of the films they're based on, but The Amazing Spider-Man takes a different tack. Despite sharing the same title as the upcoming silver-screen reboot, this game is an epilogue to the film. This gave the developers the freedom to craft an original story—written by Seamus Kevin Fahey (who scribed episodes of *Spartacus: Vengeance* and *Battlestar Galactica*)—in which they could expand upon the ideas introduced in the movie and throw in some comic-book references while they were at it.

One such reference was evident in the first level we checked out of



[Above] No, Spider-Man doesn't fight giant henchmen; that's just the power of perspective.



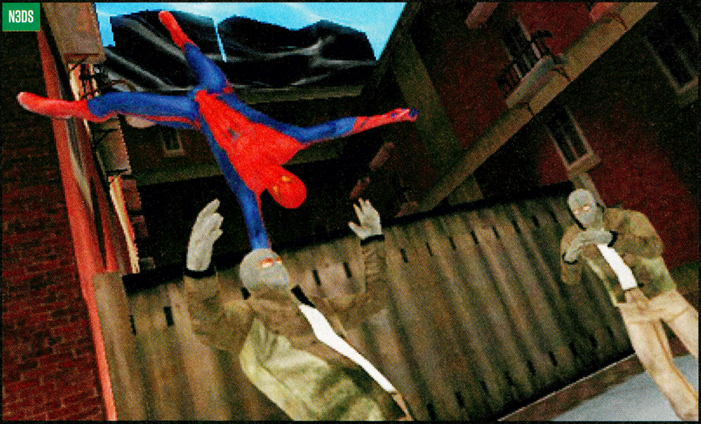


the Wii console version, wherein Spidey enters a bank that Felicia Hardy and her goons are in the process of robbing. As comic fans know, Felicia is better known as Black Cat, but it was stated emphatically that she is *not* Black Cat yet in this game. Ms. Hardy heads off for the vault with the bank manager in tow, and leaves her goons to watch over things in the main area of the building. Hiding in the shadows on the ceiling, Spider-Man has the element of surprise on his side.

This is where we were introduced to the Web Rush mechanic, which is the game's way of allowing you to experience what it's like to have Spidey's superhuman reflexes. When you hold down the Z Button, time seems to slow down and a reticle guided by the Wii Remote controller appears onscreen. You then point your reticle at a target and release Z to have Spider-Man employ a Web Rush maneuver. What you actually do when you let go of the button depends on the context. Use Web Rush on a faraway enemy, for example, and Spider-Man will fly toward the foe like a missile. Aim at an unaware opponent right below the wall-crawler, and he will sneak down, wrap the baddie in a ball of webbing, and then hang it from the ceiling. In the case of this bank heist, Spidey picks off a few of Felicia's henchmen using this stealth-takedown technique before utilizing Web Rush on a huge chandelier to send it crashing down on the bad guys. This alerts the remaining adversaries to Spider-Man's presence, however. The webslinger tries to slink back into the shadows (you shake the Nunchuk controller to retreat to the ceiling), but his opponents spot him, so he dives

TAKE A BITE OUT OF CRIME

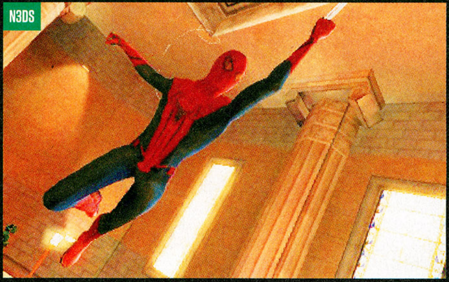
When developing the Nintendo 3DS version of The Amazing Spider-Man, Beenox made sure to take advantage of the autostereoscopic handheld's unique features. Their efforts are best appreciated in the N3DS-exclusive Vigilante mode. Here you tackle bite-size missions across the various districts of New York City. Instead of actually playing these missions, however, you just select an action such as fight, sneak in, or Web Rush—all of which consume Action Points (AP)—and see the win-or-lose outcome. Thankfully, you're shown the probability of success for each action before you spend your AP. It behooves you to put the odds in your favor, as your AP recharges when you level up. (Of course, you can spend your Play Coins to purchase more AP.) If you accomplish the mission, you're rewarded with experience points for both Vigilante mode and the main game. Fortunately, you can make things easier by connecting with other players via StreetPass and acquiring experience or AP bonuses from them.



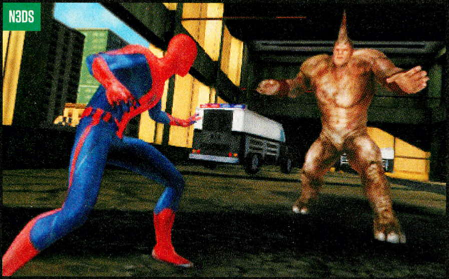
into the fray for some fisticuffs. If you just keep tapping B, he will execute a wide array of punches and kicks as well as pro-wrestling moves such as hurricanranas (you can unlock and upgrade moves as you progress). Additionally, you can employ a signature move by pressing C or dodge an incoming attack by shaking the Wii Remote when the respective prompts appear onscreen.

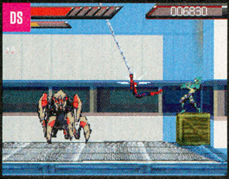
After the final opponent was defeated, the presentation shifted to an altogether different part of the game, in which Spider-Man heads off to the roof of the Oscorp building and faces off with a gigantic snakelike robot—a Spider-Slayer (another comic-book reference)—that grabs some scientists with its tentacles. To defeat the Spider-Slayer, Spidey grabs the Slayer's mechanical minions and tosses them at the titanic foe, distracting the creature and allowing the wall-crawler to Web Rush up to its head. Once he's dealt some damage to its cranium, stunning it, Spider-Man rescues the hostages by Web Rushing them.

All of these aforementioned events are present in the Nintendo 3DS handheld version of The Amazing Spider-Man, too—aside from the controls, the stereoscopic visuals, and the Vigilante mode (see the sidebar), the N3DS game has the same content as the Wii installment. The mission we played in the N3DS edition tasked us with breaking a scientist out of an asylum. (Revealing who the scientist is and why Spidey's breaking him out might constitute providing movie spoilers, so we're going to keep things a little vague.) To accomplish this goal, Spidey has to climb through air ducts to the main control room. Freeing the captive isn't as easy as pressing a button, though; you have to use the stylus to match colored blocks on the console that controls all the doors' locks. Suddenly, a guard shoots at the webslinger from behind. Spidey

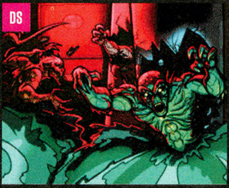


[Below] In yet another nod to the comic books, the Rhino appears as a boss in the game. We didn't see him in our demo, but we bet he'll be a handful.



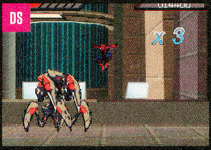


Spidey's foes include killer robots and cross-species monsters.



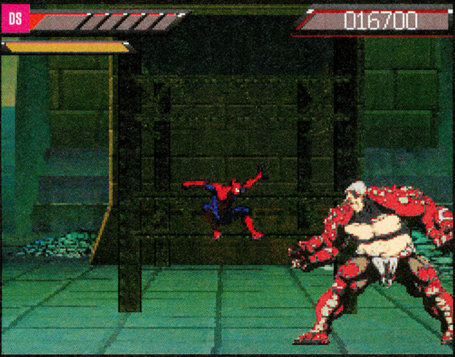
dodges, but the console gets hit, which unlocks every cell in the facility. Spider-Man then has to dispatch the freed inmates (this time you press Y to attack, X to Web Rush, and an icon on the touch screen to dodge) and rescue the rest of the guards before he can continue with his primary objective. (Unfortunately, we never got to see the mission reach its conclusion during our demo.)

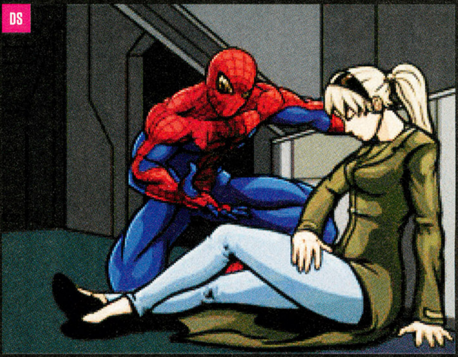
The Nintendo DS edition shares the same basic premise as its siblings, but whereas the Wii and N3DS versions are fully polygonal affairs, this one is a side-scrolling Metroid-style game. Here you traverse a New York City hub world and dive into randomly generated levels. There isn't a stealth element like there is in the other versions; instead, you run, crawl, and web-swing (hold B) to your opponents and punch their lights out (tap Y). Furthermore, Web Rush is a screen-filling smart-bomb attack that you can unleash (by pressing R and L) only after you've filled up the Web Rush meter.

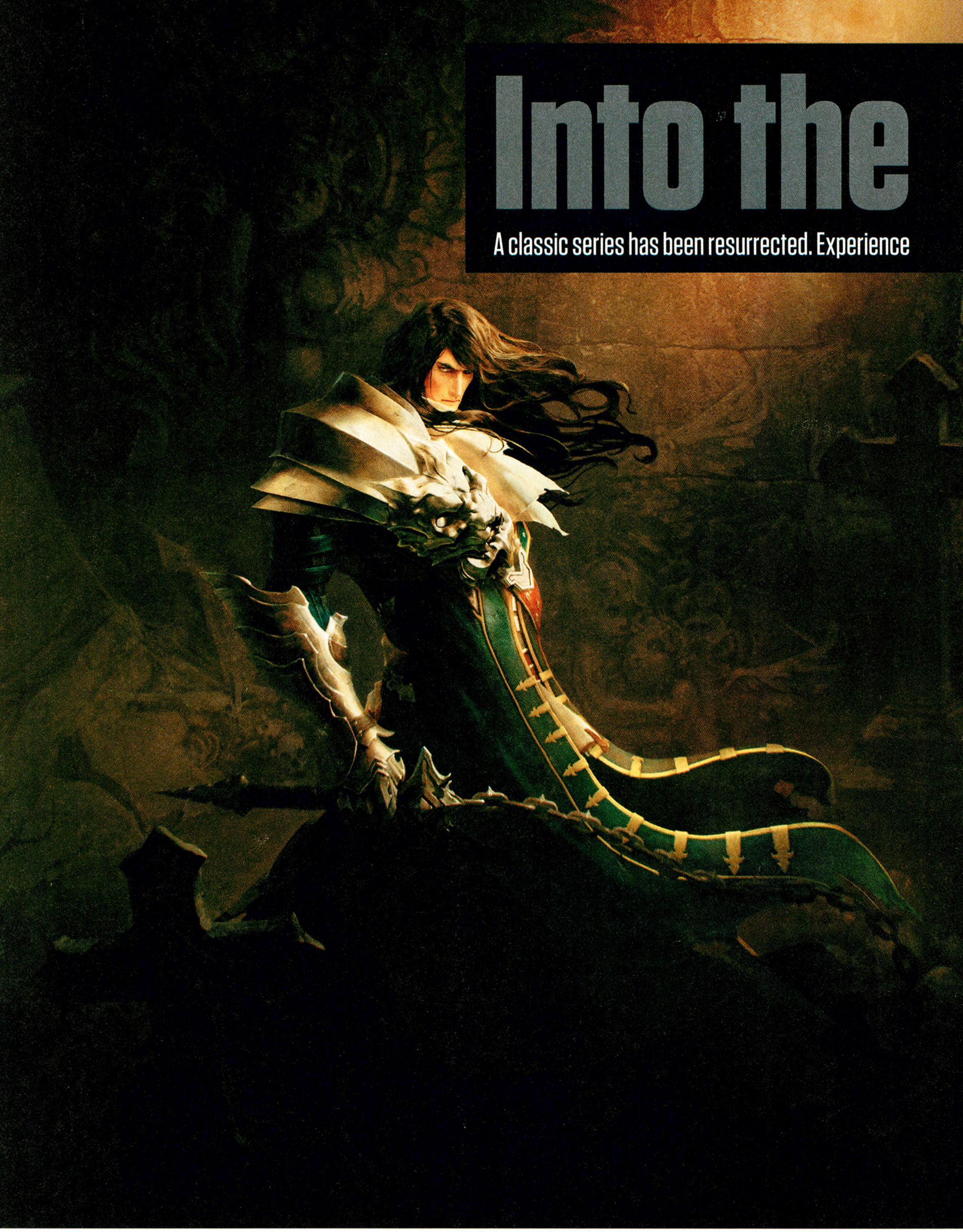


Based on what we've played so far, all three versions of The Amazing Spider-Man seem to capture the essence of ol' webhead. Of course, we wouldn't expect any less from developers Beenox and Other Ocean Interactive, both of whom have prior experience with the character (on Wii and DS, respectively). —**JUSTIN C.**

Wii N3DS DS PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **BEENOX (Wii, N3DS), OTHER OCEAN INTERACTIVE (DS)**
RELEASE: **JULY 2012**







Into the

A classic series has been resurrected. Experience

BY **CHRIS HOFFMAN**

PUBLISHER: **KONAMI** DEVELOPER: **MERCURY STEAM** RELEASE: **FALL 2012** **N3DS**

Shadows

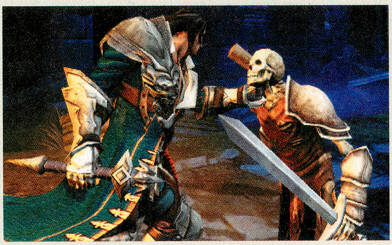
Gothic horror like never before in Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate for Nintendo 3DS.

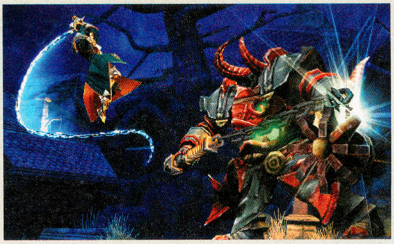
This is not the Castlevania that Nintendo fans once knew. Sure, there's whip-cracking action, crumbling castles, upgradable powers, plentiful platforming, lethal subweapons, and legions of undead foes to fight, but this is, nonetheless, not the Castlevania of old. This is the sequel to Castlevania: Lords of Shadow, the PlayStation 3/Xbox 360 game that created a brand-new continuity and style for Konami's long-running franchise. There are no cartoony creatures or androgynous pretty boys here; get ready for an adventure that's darker, more mature, and more exciting than ever before. Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate continues to redefine what vampire-slaying is all about, and it's coming exclusively to the Nintendo 3DS handheld.

* * *

The original Castlevania: Lords of Shadow was a tale of tragedy. Set in 1047, it told the story of Gabriel Belmont, a noble warrior for the Brotherhood of Light. Armed with his whiplike Combat Cross, Gabriel fought with every fiber of his being to ward off the encroaching forces of darkness, ultimately defeating the three Lords of Shadow and even Satan himself. His efforts, however, were seemingly for naught. (Warning: Spoilers ahead.) Despite overcoming the world's greatest evils and growing in strength with each victory, Gabriel could not prevent the death of his wife, Marie, who fell at his own hand, nor could he stop himself from being turned into a vampire. Gabriel achieved incredible power, but at a price—he became the very thing he once despised, and he eventually took on the name Dracul, aka The Dragon, aka Dracula.

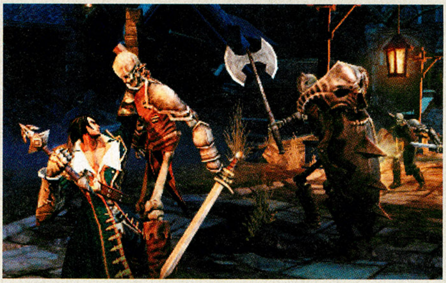
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate picks up 25 years after the conclusion of its predecessor. Gabriel has taken up residence in Bernhard Castle, which was formerly occupied by Camilla, one of the Lords of Shadow. From there he intends to rain terror down upon the human world and particularly the Brotherhood of Light for the pain that they have caused him. Fortunately, mankind has one hope: Trevor Belmont, the son that Gabriel never knew he had, who'd been raised in secret by the brotherhood. Taking the role of Trevor, now a fully grown adult, it's up to you to make Gabriel—Dracula—pay for his wicked actions and cleanse the shame from the Belmont family name.





For the team at Konami and the developers at Mercury Steam, Mirror of Fate is the opportunity to continue building the Lords of Shadow legend in an all-new form using the latest in cutting-edge portable gaming. "First and foremost, we were excited by the 3D technology itself and what we could potentially achieve with it," explains producer Dave Cox. "We wanted to re-create a miniature interpretation of the Lords of Shadow universe right in the palm of your hand, like a diorama that people could look into and feel a part of. Secondly, we felt that traditionally Castlevania games had done well on handheld and indeed found a home there to a certain extent, and the whole team really felt we could do something special and memorable on the format that would immerse players totally. The N3DS has allowed us to create something totally unique and exclusive to the format that we think players are going to absolutely love."

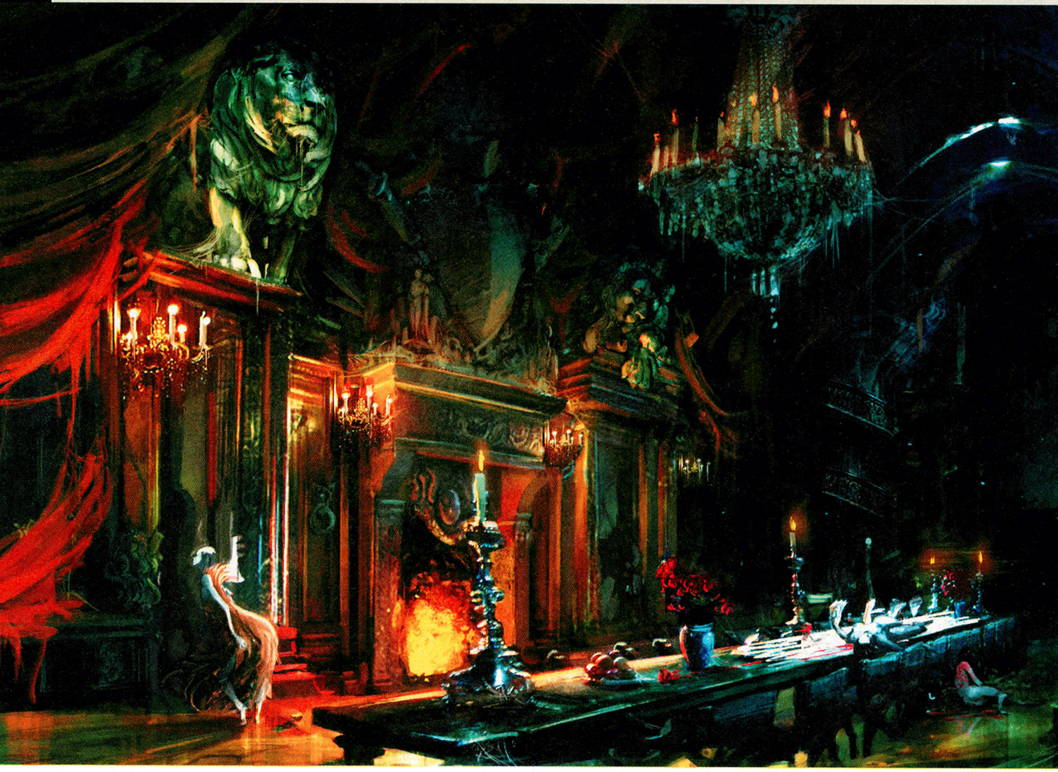
Unlike the original Lords of Shadow, which was a three-dimensional action game that took place across numerous discrete levels, Mirror of Fate is much more adventure-oriented, featuring a massive, nonlinear castle and plentiful exploration elements. The game is presented almost entirely in 2.5D–2D gameplay set within gorgeous polygonal environments that look absolutely amazing thanks to stereoscopic visual effects—with occasional shifts into full 3D gameplay. All told, the structure is more comparable to Nintendo DS titles such as Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow than it is to the first Lords of Shadow.

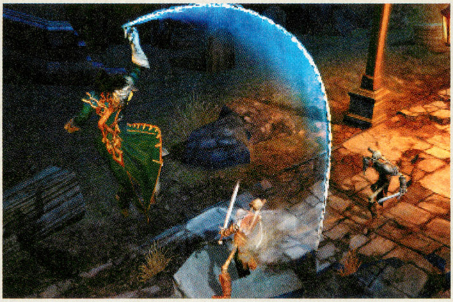


"On a technical level, we felt that we wouldn't be able to achieve the graphical fidelity of the Lords of Shadow universe by simply replicating the original game's format on the N3DS," Cox remarks. "It would have involved significant compromises and we simply didn't want to make any compromises on the quality of the visuals. Another reason was that, based on the feedback of both press and fans alike on Castlevania: Lords of Shadow, it was evident that players wanted a beefed-up exploration aspect to the game. Therefore, for those two reasons, we decided to take this more nonlinear approach to the gameplay."

DUEL OF THE FATES

In most respects, however, Mirror of Fate retains the distinctive flavor



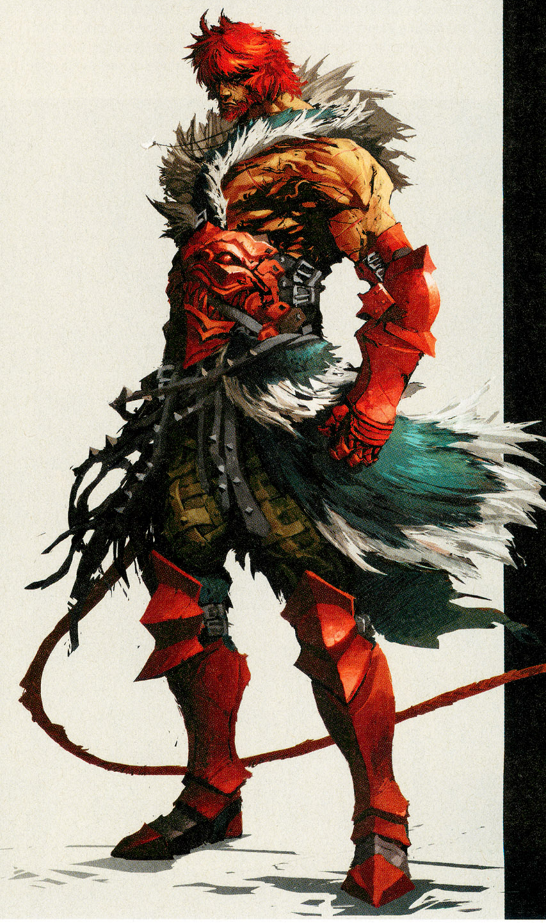


[Below] Simon Belmont is a much wilder warrior than his ancestor, Trevor.

of its predecessor—especially when it comes to its emphasis on deep combat mechanics. Using Trevor's version of the Combat Cross, you'll strike at enemies using strong direct attacks (X Button) and utilize weaker-but-wider-reaching area attacks (Y Button) when you're surrounded by foes. You'll also be able to use secondary weapons—such as a boomeranglike glaive and an electric bomb—by pressing the A Button, grab foes with the R Button, and perform blocks and defensive dodges (essential parts of Mirror of Fate's combat) via the L Button. Furthermore, Trevor will gain access to both light and shadow magic, which can be combined with his attacks to heal himself or dish out extra damage.

"It's a much deeper experience than with previous handheld Castlevania games," proclaims Cox. "We have taken the basic combat engine from Lords of Shadow and dropped it directly into the game. Players will have to really think about how to take down every enemy and what abilities or items are best for each specific one.... Our combat system was universally praised and well received by fans, and in this game we have not compromised but taken it directly onto the N3DS system to allow players to really feel the strategic element of exciting combat, deep strategy, and resource management from the original."

As you proceed through the game and send enemies back to oblivion, you'll earn experience points that you can use to unlock new combos, providing a wide array of combat possibilities. Some attacks will launch foes into the air, allowing you to follow up with aerial maneuvers, while others will smash adversaries into the earth with punishing downward strikes—useful for finishing off certain enemies who may reanimate themselves if given a chance. During our hands-on time with the game, encounters with Dracula's army—which includes skeletons, axe-wielding undead



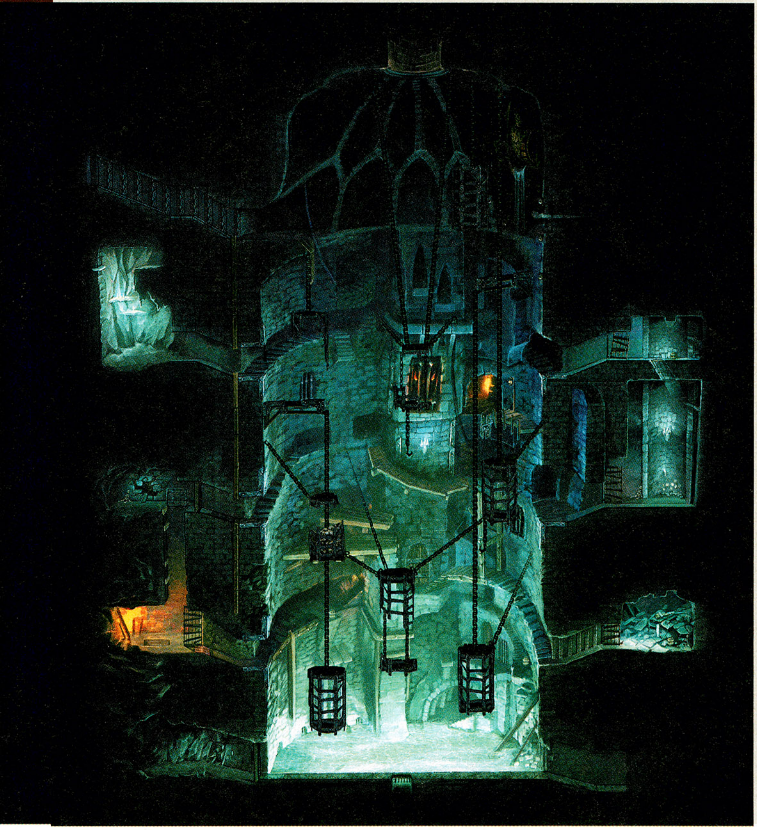
knights, and morning-star-equipped armored warriors—occasionally felt drawn out, but we're hopeful that Konami will refine the pacing in the final product.

ON THE HUNT

When you're not sending the undead back from whence they came, you'll have the chance to engage in platforming-driven exploration. After eliminating some man-sized vampire bats that ambushed us in a chapel, for example, we discovered that a chunk of wall that was broken during the fight provided a handhold that allowed us to ascend to the chamber's upper reaches. By climbing ledges, jumping on chandeliers, and using the Combat Cross to snag grapple points and swing across unjumpable gaps, we eventually reached a crank that was connected to the room's central chandelier. Activating the crank sent the light fixture crashing to the floor, smashing open a new passageway that gave us further access to the castle.

"Beefing up the exploration element was key," Cox confirms. "This automatically meant the platforming was going to have to be considered and we have tried to make this much better than it was in Castlevania: Lords of Shadow. We have incorporated the platform style from that game with the more-traditional platforming seen in the older Castlevania titles to really make it a lot more fun and familiar. We have added some new elements to the platforming, such as the safe-fall ability—this allows players to use their weapon to break their fall in particularly steep descents—and there is the ability to jump from wall to wall. Combat can occur while platforming for more variety and a greater sense of danger."

Within the castle's dank, underground catacombs we encountered a locked door barring our progress. To proceed we had to descend even deeper, through tunnels partially carved by ancient tree roots. After destroying some enemies, crawling through a few passages, and swinging from a cave ceiling to reach a distant ledge, we were able to activate a lever that opened the locked door. A telltale tick indicated that we had limited time before the door shut, so we had to quickly retrace our steps. A skeleton ambush threatened to halt our progress, but we were able to slip past the enemy, get through the door, and pull another lever to render the door permanently open.

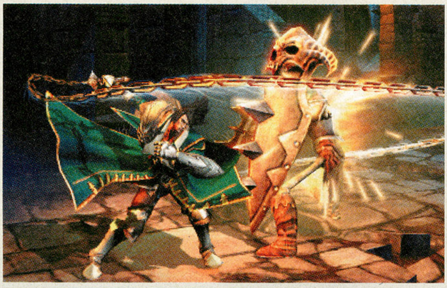


Our next destination was highlighted on the convenient touch-screen map, but it often pays to stray from the beaten path; by backtracking a bit and climbing through an opening in the decayed ceiling, we found ourselves above ground once again, where we retrieved a power up from a treasure chest, extending Trevor's health bar. (You can acquire magic-meter boosts, as well.)

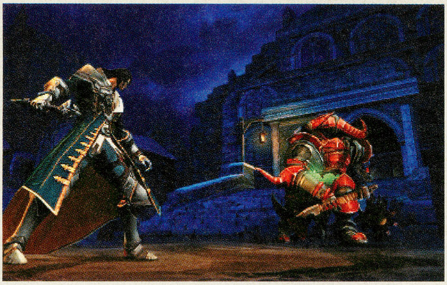
BLOOD TIES

But Trevor's story makes up only part of Mirror of Fate. In addition to him, players will get to control the legendary Simon Belmont (Trevor's descendent), as well as two other characters that haven't yet been revealed. As the game unfolds, you'll control each character in his own distinct part of the adventure before switching to a new character—in a new time period—at a predetermined point.

Though the core gameplay remains the same for each character, there are definite differences. Instead of the Combat Cross, Simon



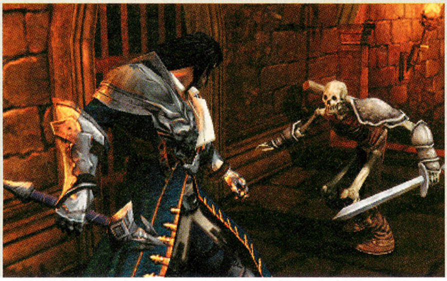
[Above] Even shielded foes will fall before the might of the Combat Cross.



wields the magical Vampire Killer leather whip, and he's able to arm himself with axes (trajectory-based throwing weapons) and burning oil (a ground-based weapon that's most effective when you're surrounded by enemies). And instead of using different types of magic, Simon is aided by mystical guardians that can be summoned to either help him in battle or protect him from harm.

As Cox explains, Trevor and Simon also have distinct personalities. "Trevor is very similar to Gabriel in temperament—cool, calm, and collected. A fearsome warrior who rarely loses control, a gentleman with honor on a righteous quest," he says. "Simon, on the other hand, is the complete opposite—quick to anger, an aggressive fighter who is brash and wild. A barbarian who doesn't care for honor but fights like a man possessed looking for revenge and [has no mercy for] anyone who gets in his way. This difference in character is a result of very different upbringing between the two of them, which is explained in the story."

Despite the fact that you'll be exploring Dracula's castle with four separate characters, you won't simply be retreading the same ground. Changes in the environments over



THE SHADOW KNOWS

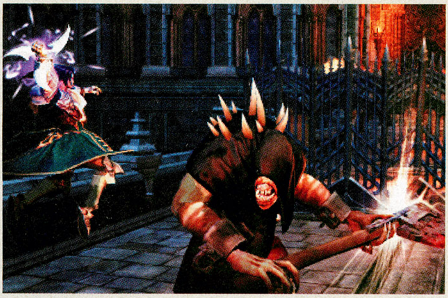
Want to learn even more about what's in store in Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate? So did we. Here are further details on the title, courtesy of producer Dave Cox.

NINTENDO POWER **Why did you decide to revisit characters like Simon Belmont and Trevor Belmont for this title?**
DAVE COX This alternate universe in which the game is set is deliberately kept apart from the previous Castlevania games. Our goal with the Lords of Shadow universe was to completely reboot the story and reboot the brand. However, we wanted to have characters, monsters, and places from the previous games that would feel familiar but where we could surprise people with our new take on them. I suppose it's comparable with the Marvel Ultimates series of comics where characters are reimagined and well-known storylines turned on their head and given a fresh, new perspective.

Does the game take place entirely in the castle or are their other locations, too?
Unlike in Castlevania: Lords of Shadow, this game is set mostly in the castle, although their are some dark forests and underground caves to explore before you get there!

Other than Lords of Shadow, were there any past Castlevania titles that particularly helped influence this game?
In the original game Castlevania: Lords of Shadow, we really were influenced by the classic games, in particular Super Castlevania IV on the Super Nintendo and the original Castlevania game on NES. Again, this is what we used as our source for inspiration, but we did look at the [nonlinear]-style games this time too and look to see what's cool about them as well. I think it's fair to say this game is an amalgam of both of those types of games as an influence, but not to the point of being a copy or pastiche. We strongly feel that carving a new and exciting identity for Castlevania is key here and so I think if you liked Castlevania: Lords of Shadow you will absolutely love this game, too.

Will Patrick Stewart, Robert Carlyle, or any of the other actors from Lords of Shadow be reprising their roles?
Robert Carlyle returns, and some new actors, too!



[Above] You'll have to use all your offensive and defensive skills against bosses such as this imposing executioner. Trevor comes up to only his knee!

time, as well as each character's specific abilities, ensure that the action stays interesting. Certain paths are open only to characters who can double-jump, for example, and events that occur in one era will affect what you can do and where you can go in later eras (although you won't always necessarily be playing through the time periods in chronological order). "Variety will be there," assures Cox, "and players will find a ton of secrets and hidden areas thought the huge expanse of Dracula's castle as it opens up before them. We expect players to take around 15-20 hours to see everything this game has to offer, and a climax that will set up the events of Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2."

For that to happen, however, the heroes will have to overcome the titular Mirror of Fate—a device that shows characters visions of the future, revealing their destinies. Similar themes are also represented through a character known as "the lost soul" who plays an important part in the story. Before all is said and done, each character will have to face his fate and overcome it—or be a slave to it.

STAKING A CLAIM

On top of all of the action and exploration that Mirror of Fate brings to the table, the title takes advantage of the numerous features provided by the Nintendo 3DS hardware. Players can can use the touch screen to leave notes for themselves (for example, to indicate areas of interest that they want to return to later) and to gain virtually instant access to the game's travel book (which shows all your combos and items) and bestiary (which details enemy strengths and weaknesses). And although Konami hasn't divulged any specific details, you can expect StreetPass and SpotPass features, including new downloadable content.

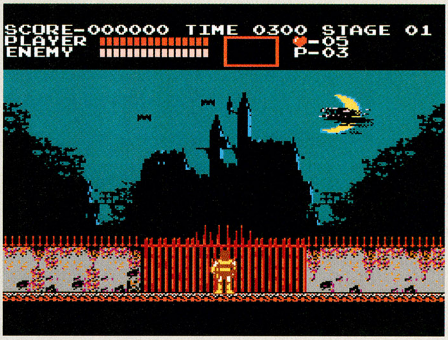
Most importantly, though, players can look forward to a rich, compelling Castlevania experience that builds upon the series's sucess on Nintendo systems while bringing it into the modern era to hook a new generation of players.

"Castlevania games have been around for such a long time because [the series] has core fundamentals that make it unique and fun to play," asserts Cox. "These core fundamentals have stood the test of time for good reason—they work! We have taken those unique fundamentals and made them a part of this new direction. If you haven't played a Castlevania game before, then this is a perfect jumping-in point.... It's got depth and replayability and lush visuals that you simply won't believe possible on Nintendo's handheld. It's a must-have to play in 3D because genuinely it makes a difference. I don't think its gets much better than this on Nintendo 3DS!"

Great Moments in Vampire-Slaying History

We celebrate 25 chilling years of Castlevania with a look at the highs (and lows) of the iconic franchise.

When Castlevania for the NES arrived in North America back in May 1987, players knew they were in for something special. Certainly, Castlevania wasn't the first horror-infused video game out there, but by combining classic monster motifs with intense-yet-deliberately paced action and a unique whip-wielding hero, Konami created an experience that challenged players' skills and piqued their imaginations. Castlevania proved successful enough that two NES sequels followed, and the series quickly spread to nearly every game system out there, including Game Boy, Super NES, Sega Genesis, PC Engine, PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, and more, evolving when necessary and continually delivering a distinctive brand of Gothic-themed vampire-hunting fun. To celebrate Castlevania's quarter-century of success, here's a look at some of the most notable moments in the series's history.

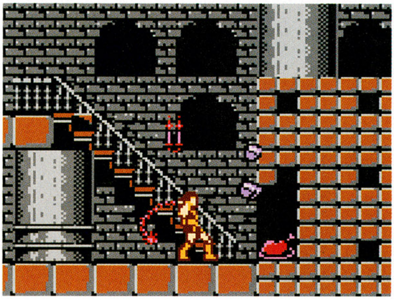


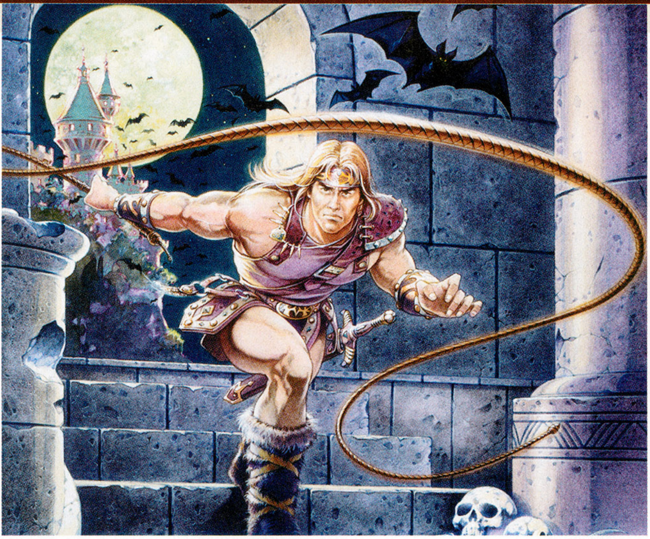
Welcome to Castlevania

Despite the limitations of the 8-bit graphics, the opening of the original Castlevania did a fantastic job of setting the stage for what was to come. The mysterious castle, the moon hidden by ominous clouds, and the spooky music did a great job of preparing players to set foot inside the walls of Dracula's legendary castle for the first time.

Mystery Meat

Classic game heroes had the oddest habits of finding nourishment in the most unlikely of places. In the original Castlevania, for example, protagonist Simon Belmont could replenish his life by consuming meat that he found, strangely enough, concealed within the walls of Dracula's castle. We don't know what kind of meat it is or how long it's been hiding there, but we suppose that beggars can't be choosers.





BEST BELMONT

Simon Belmont

The Castlevania series has starred a number of different characters from the venerable Belmont family, but Simon Belmont, star of the original Castlevania, remains our favorite. Clad in leather and armed with the Vampire Killer whip, the rugged, barbarian-esque Simon starred in three of the first four console Castlevania games. He's also established himself as one of the manliest heroes around by battling vampires and other creatures of the night without the luxury of pants.

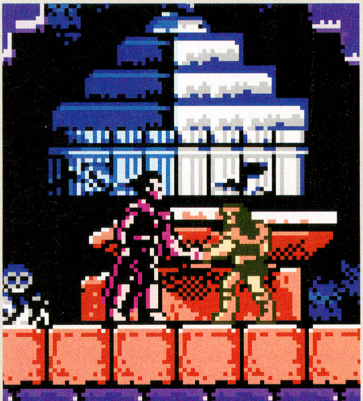
BEST SUBWEAPON

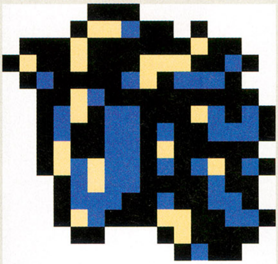
Right Back at Ya

Out of all of the secondary weapons in the Castlevania games, the cross-shaped boomerang is arguably the best. It can hit multiple targets, it's powerful, and it has good range. Grab yourself a power-up so you can throw three at once, and even Drac himself will be running scared.

Join the Team

Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse abandoned the exploration-based elements of Castlevania II and returned to the action-driven formula of the original title. However, the game featured numerous enhancements, including branching paths and multiple playable characters. For the first time, players could control someone other than a Belmont, specifically thief Grant DaNasty, mage Sypha Belnades, and Dracula's son Alucard.

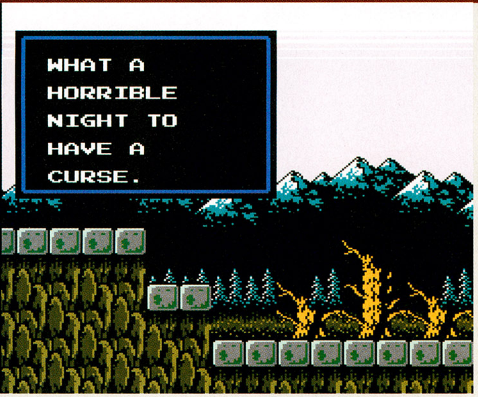




Heads Up

The flying Medusa-head enemies are either one of the greatest creations in Castlevania history or one of the worst. Or possibly both. Their hard-to-avoid parabolic flight patterns make them incredibly annoying enemies—especially when they inevitably knock you into a nearby pit—but that's what makes them so brilliant.

BEST ENEMY



WHAT A
HORRIBLE
NIGHT TO
HAVE A
CURSE.

Oh, Curses

There are some phrases in video games that just stick with you. Here are a few of our favorites from the Castlevania series:

"What a horrible night to have a curse."
—FROM CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

"Sure, I'll take you to a good place. Heh!! Heh!! Heh!!"
—FROM CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

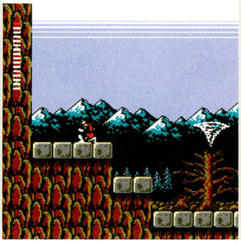
"What is a man? A miserable little pile of secrets!"
—FROM CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

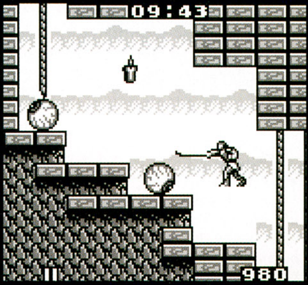
"Let us go out this evening for pleasure. The night is still young."
—FROM CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

MOST INFURIATING

Deborah's Cliff

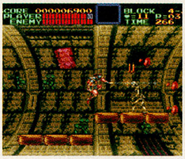
Castlevania II: Simon's Quest is a love-it-or-hate-it type of game; though many enjoy the RPG elements, day/night cycle, and nonlinear take on the Castlevania formula, others are put off by its obtuse puzzles. One such puzzle is at Deborah's Cliff, an apparent dead end where you're required to crouch for a few seconds while holding the Red Crystal in order to ride a whirlwind to the next area of the game. It's diabolical but very memorable.





Castlevania Goes Portable

In 1989 Castlevania arrived on Game Boy with Castlevania: The Adventure, marking the series's first appearance on a portable gaming system. Sure, the game was somewhat sluggish and not as inspired as its console brethren, but it was portable Castlevania, and back then that was pretty awesome. Furthermore, it marked the start of a partnership between Castlevania and Nintendo handhelds that continues to this day.



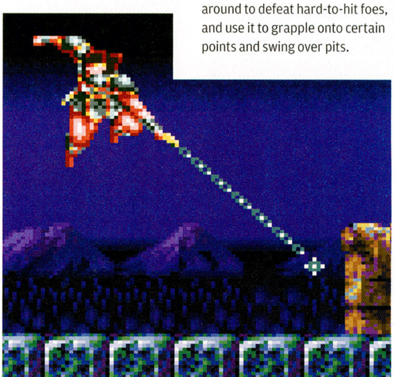
Go for a Spin

Super Castlevania IV featured lots of nifty new elements, but the neatest can be found in the game's fourth stage. The developers seemingly used all of the Super NES's cool hardware tricks in this area; in one section you must latch onto a grapple point while the room rotates around you, and in another you find yourself in a bizarre spinning chamber that gives you the feeling of being inside a rolling barrel.

BEST WHIP

Whip It Good

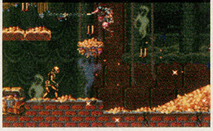
The Vampire Killer whip has been a Castlevania tradition since the beginning, but Super Castlevania IV added some especially cool versatility to the weapon. Not only could Simon strike with the whip in any of eight directions, but he could also let it go limp and flail it around to defeat hard-to-hit foes, and use it to grapple onto certain points and swing over pits.

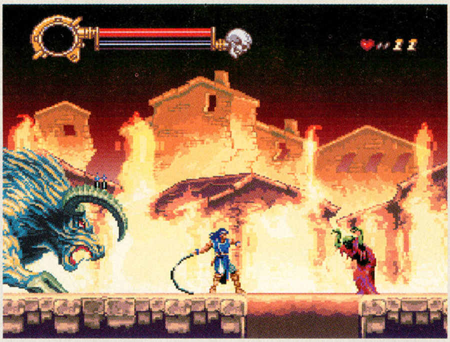


BEST LEVEL

Pure Gold

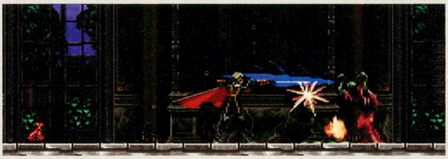
In a series packed full of eerie locales and creepy confines, our favorite setting is probably the unique treasury stage (Level 9) of Super Castlevania IV. Dracula, it turns out, is a very wealthy man, and his coffers are literally overflowing with gold. As specters float through the background, you'll climb piles of coins, hop on treasure chests, and walk on platforms made of cash as they disintegrate beneath your feet. Even the boss—a giant bat—was made out of jewels and gold.





Bull Run

Whether you encountered it in the second stage of Castlevania: Rondo of Blood or the first stage of Castlevania: Dracula X (Rondo of Blood's Super NES remake/pseudosequel), the giant, bull-like Behemoth was a terrifying sight to behold. Gargantuan and unstoppable, the Behemoth basically left gamers with a simple choice: flee or get trampled into the ground. It's one of the more frightening encounters in the entire series.



Sweet Symphony

When Castlevania: Symphony of the Night arrived in 1997 it went a long way toward reinventing the franchise. Specifically, it changed the series from an action-driven experience to a nonlinear, exploration-based one that felt similar to the Metroid series. Tons of weapons and items could be acquired, and new abilities allowed you to reach additional areas of the massive, interconnected castle. Though some of these elements were touched on in Castlevania II: Simon's Quest, Symphony established them as the new paradigm, and they've influenced nearly every Castlevania game since.

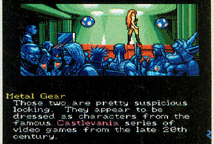
The Boss Gauntlet

The end of Super Castlevania IV was a doozy: you had to face three tough bosses (the trident-equipped Slogra, the fire-breathing Gaibon, and Death himself) before squaring off against Count Dracula. Each battle was pretty cool in its own right, and in combination they equaled one impressive finale. Death had been a series mainstay since the start, but this marked the first appearances of Slogra and Gaibon, who went on to cause trouble in many other Castlevania games.

BEST BOSSES

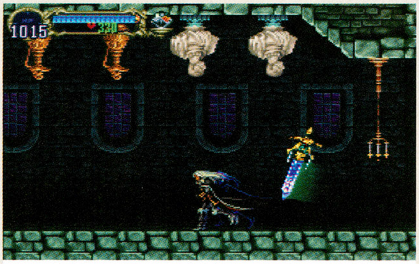
BEST CROSSOVER

Drac's Night Out



Metal Gear
Those two are pretty suspicious looking. They appear to be dressed as characters from the famous Castlevania series of video games from the late 20th century.

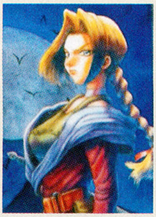
Considering the popularity of Castlevania, it's not surprising that the series made cameo appearances in other Konami titles. One of the most noteworthy was in Hideo Kojima's cult-hit graphic-text sci-fi adventure Snatcher. In that game, protagonist Gillian Seed visits a club where he meets patrons dressed as Simon Belmont and Dracula. The encounter leads to a highly amusing discussion about the original Castlevania, in which Gillian proclaims he became incredibly angry playing the game because he couldn't jump off the stairs. Gillian's robotic partner replies, "Everyone felt that way, Gillian. It was very frustrating! According to statistical records, the teenage suicide rate increased dramatically in that year." We're pleased to report that the last part isn't based on facts.



Flipping Out

BEST SURPRISE

When you fought Richter Belmont in Dracula's throne room in Castlevania: Symphony of the Night, it seemed like the end of the game. But that wasn't the case at all; if you took the right actions, you would discover that it was merely the halfway point. An entire second castle—an upside-down version of the main castle—was yours to explore, offering an expanded story and new challenges for players who thought Alucard's journey was at an end. Though later Castlevania games implemented similar twists, Symphony's was the most impactful.

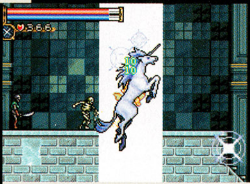


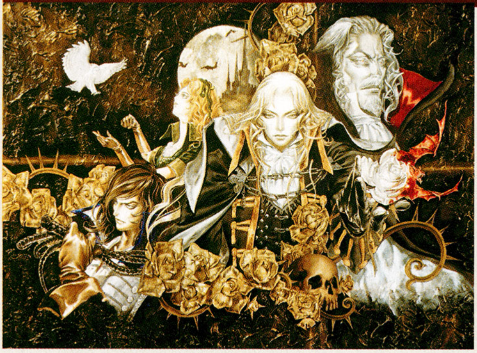
Girl Power

Castlevania Legends, the third Castlevania title on Game Boy, wasn't an especially memorable game, but it marked the first time in the series that a female was cast in the starring role. Though Sonia Belmont was later retconned into obscurity, she nonetheless once held a place in history as the matriarch of the Belmont clan.

The Art of the Dual

One of the coolest parts of Castlevania: Circle of the Moon (the first Castlevania game for Game Boy Advance) was the inclusion of the Dual Set-Up System. Sure, it had an awkward name, but the DSS, as it was commonly known, allowed you to select pairs of cards to augment hero Nathan Graves with a whopping 100 abilities. These powers ranged from a flame whip to stat boosts to elemental magic attacks. You could even summon a unicorn!





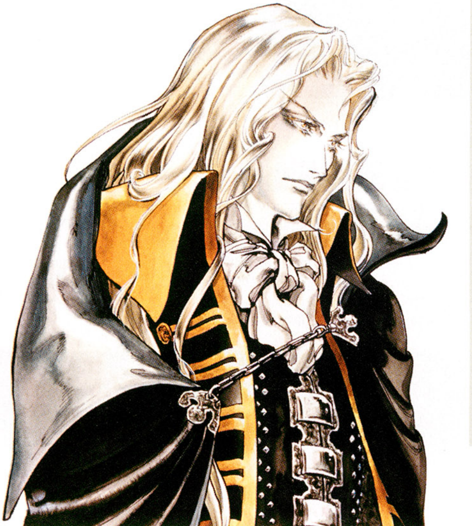
A Touch of Class

In addition to novel gameplay elements, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night introduced a striking new visual direction by artist Ayami Kojima. With a more painterly aesthetic than previous series entries, Kojima's work brought an air of mature sophistication to the Castlevania universe, establishing a beautiful style that would set the tone of the franchise for many years.

Rising Son

BEST NON-BELMONT HERO

Who's the greatest Castlevania hero outside of the Belmont family? There are many strong contenders, but only one serious choice: Alucard, the heroic son of Dracula. Vehemently opposed to his father's ways, the elegant, soft-spoken half-vampire really came into his own in Symphony of the Night. Alucard's powers of darkness make him more than a match for his dad's demonic ways—he can shoot fireballs and gain powers that let him change forms—and his ability to equip numerous types of weapons and armor offers a nice change of pace from the usual whip-wielding do-gooders.



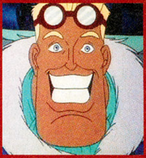
EMBARRASSING MOMENTS IN VAMPIRE-SLAYING HISTORY

You win some, you lose some. Here are a few instances in which Castlevania definitely lost.

Perfect Selection
ドラキュラ

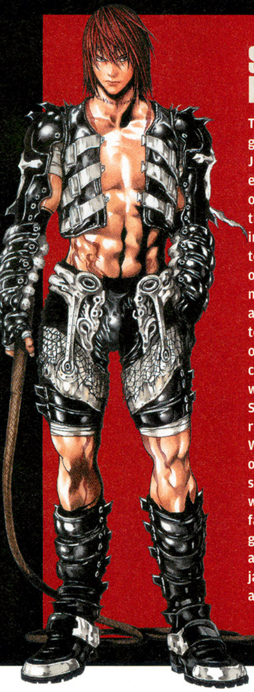
The Castlevania Rap Album

Game soundtracks—both original and arranged—are reasonably popular in Japan, so it makes sense that Castlevania has had a fair number of them over the years. Some have been good; others, not so much. The Perfect Selection Dracula CD (released in 1991), for example, is notorious for having added words to some of the series's most popular tunes. Often known as "the Castlevania rap album," the CD features mind-blowing lyrics such as, "It's been 100 years since Dracula made his move! / He's back! He's ready! Coming soon! / Dracula, you'd better beware; your time is through! / 'Cause Simmon [sic] is coming after you! / He's coming! Right now! Get ready! Right now! Beware!" It only gets worse from there.



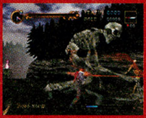
Simon in *Captain N*

The '80s Saturday-morning cartoon *Captain N: The Game Master* starred characters from a variety of popular video games. Simon Belmont was lucky enough to make the cut as one of the show's leading heroes, but unfortunately for him he was redesigned to the point that he was nothing like his original self. Instead of a warrior, this version of Simon looked like some sort of mountain-climbing pilot, and he was portrayed as a conceited, incompetent fool.



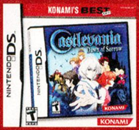
Simon's Redesign

Though fighting game Castlevania: Judgment wasn't everybody's cup of tea, it was, at the very least, an interesting attempt to put a new spin on the Castlevania mythos, as well as an opportunity to flesh out some of the franchise's characters. But what's the deal with Simon Belmont's radical redesign? We know that his original leather skirt/no pants look wasn't exactly fashionable, but his gaudy new shorts and undersized jacket are wrong in almost every way.



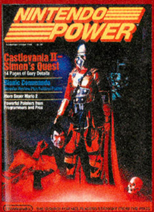
The Nintendo 64 Games

Some series, such as Super Mario and The Legend of Zelda, made the jump from 2D to 3D look easy. Castlevania, on the other hand, did not; the series's first Nintendo 64 entry, simply titled Castlevania, was clunky, ugly, and not very fun. A sequel, called Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness, was somewhat better than its predecessor, but both games go down in Castlevania history as low points in the series.



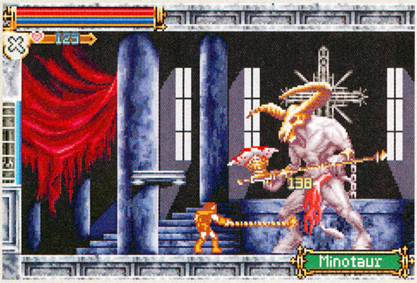
Boxed In

Yo dawg, I heard you like box art.... It doesn't take a design guru to realize that this rerelease of Dawn of Sorrow looks thoroughly ridiculous.


NINTENDO POWER
Castlevania II— Simon's Quest
14 Pages of Gory Details
Bionic Commando
More Super Mario 2
Powerful Pointers from Programmers and Pros

Nintendo Power Vol. 2

When the Nintendo Power editors decided to put some dude cosplaying as Simon carrying Dracula's severed head on the cover of the second issue of the magazine, they had no idea of the havoc they were about to unleash. Children had nightmares. Parents complained. And worst of all, it looks pretty silly. What can we say—it was the '80s!

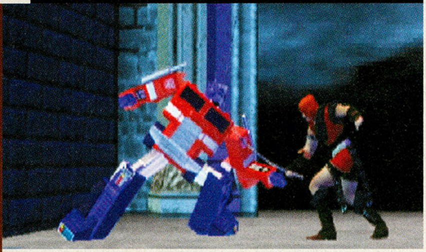


8-Bit Love

There are many reasons to like Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance for GBA. After all, it was the first Castlevania game produced by Koji Igarashi for a Nintendo system, and it featured many similarities to Symphony of the Night. Our favorite part, though, was the ability to enter a secret code that allowed you to play as an 8-bit NES-style Simon Belmont (or is it Trevor?) in the game's Boss Rush mode. It was an excellent treat to celebrate Castlevania's 15th anniversary.

A Brawl to End Them All

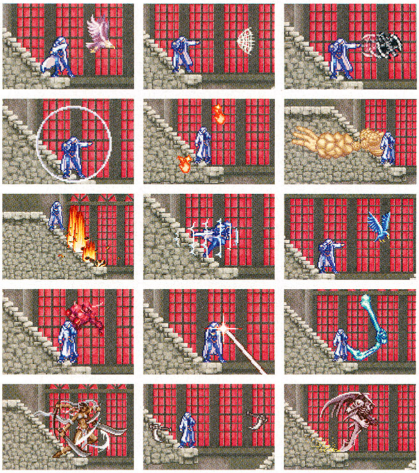
Remember the time that Simon Belmont fought Optimus Prime? No? Well, our friends in Japan might. A multiplayer Super Smash Bros.-style fighting game called Dream Mix TV: World Fighters was released there in 2003, and in addition to boasting playable Konami favorites such as Simon Belmont and Solid Snake, it featured characters from Hudson and toymaker Takara, including Optimus Prime and Megatron. Weird? Yeah, that's an understatement.



CLASSIC NES SERIES
GAME BOY ADVANCE
Castlevania
KONAMI
E

The Classic Returns

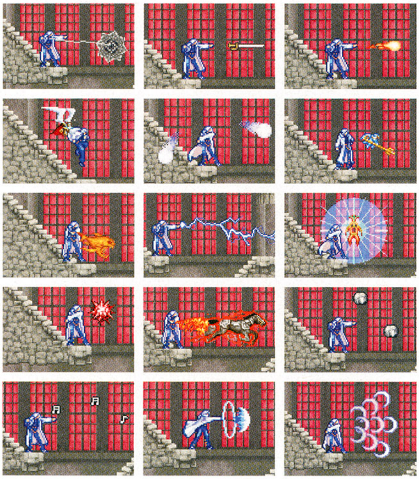
In 2004 Nintendo released several vintage NES titles on Game Boy Advance. The original Castlevania was one of the classics included in the series, allowing players to experience a pixel-perfect port of the original game in convenient portable form.

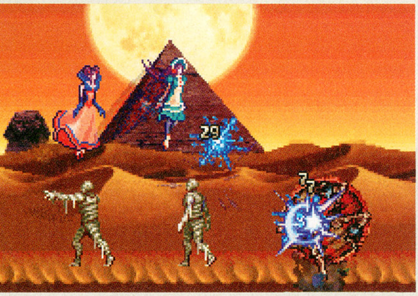


Food for the Soul

BEST GAMEPLAY HOOK

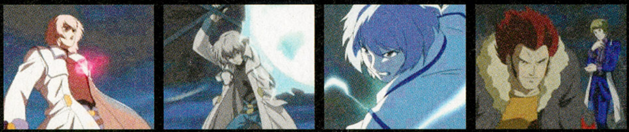
Out of all the distinctive gameplay hooks in the Castlevania series, the best is arguably the Tactical Soul System from Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow. Every enemy creature in the game had a soul that would be released (sometimes randomly) upon the foe's defeat, and each one granted hero Soma Cruz a different ability. You could walk underwater, shoot lightning from your fingers, summon attack birds, freeze time, transform into a demon, fire a variety of weapons, or become temporarily invincible—and those are only a few of the more than 100 powers you could obtain.





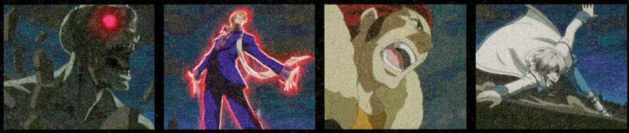
Sister Act

Many recent Castlevania games have included unlockable bonus modes that allow you to play as different characters than the ones featured in the main story. One of our favorite instances is in Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin for DS. In a prologue to the main story, players get to control twin sisters Stella and Loretta Lecarde, who appear as villains in the main game. The neat part is that the sisters' gameplay is all touch screen-based; as Stella you can perform slash attacks (by drawing lines on the touch screen) and as Loretta you can rapidly fire magic projectiles (by touching the screen to aim). It works surprisingly well!



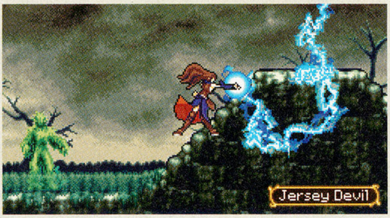
Getting Animated

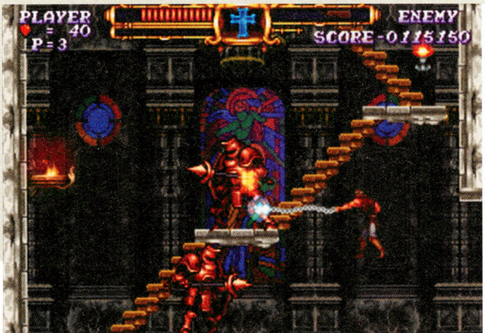
Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, released in 2005 for DS, marked the introduction of a new, younger-skewing, anime-style art direction for the series. Love it or hate it, it's hard to deny that the fully animated cartoon-quality intro looked freaking awesome.



An Expanded World

Although the exploration-heavy Castlevania games on GBA and DS were always fun, they did, admittedly, become somewhat formulaic. Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia attempted to shake things up by adding a world map that allowed you to access numerous environments outside of Dracula's castle, including forests, a prison, a lighthouse, a village, and assorted derelict ruins. Variety is always a good thing!





Return to Old-School

Just when it seemed that Castlevania had given up on straightforward action for good, along came Castlevania: The Adventure ReBirth for WiiWare in late 2009. Though ostensibly a remake of Game Boy title Castlevania: The Adventure, ReBirth bore little resemblance to its portable predecessor (the stages and bosses were almost completely different), but it was nonetheless a glorious return to Castlevania's roots. Controlling Christopher Belmont, players were treated to six stages of whip-cracking fun.

BEST PLOT POINT

Party Like it's 1999

Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow introduced a very interesting plot point in the Castlevania universe: apparently in 1999, Julius Belmont waged an epic war against Dracula and somehow vanquished the dark lord forever. The story was only alluded to in dialogue, not shown, leaving players to speculate on the details of how the battle unfolded. We have no doubt that the tale could have been made into a monumental game, but with that version of Castlevania lore being relegated to the back burner, we may never find out exactly what occurred.

POWER
RESET
EJECT
Wii

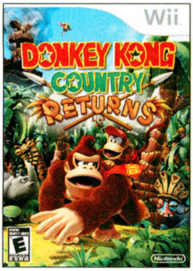
Wii Essentials

ARE YOU A DISCERNING GAMER INTENT ON EXPERIENCING THE VERY BEST A CONSOLE HAS TO OFFER? LOOK NO FURTHER THAN NP'S DEFINITIVE LIST OF MUST-PLAY Wii GAMES.

The wait for a new console can be agonizing, but rather than stare at the calendar, why not take the opportunity to squeeze every last drop of enjoyment from your current system? To help you do just that, the NP crew has assembled what we believe constitutes the ultimate Wii library; we've whittled the nearly 1,000 titles released for the platform down to 30 standouts. Some of these games were smash hits and others flew under the radar, but all of them are memorable experiences worthy of a place on your shelf.

THE MUST-HAVES

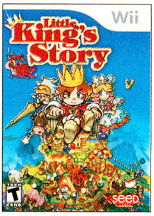
This is the crème de la crème. If you have an exceptionally small shelf that can hold only 10 games, make sure these are the 10 with which you fill it.



Donkey Kong Country Returns

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS

For the longest time, Donkey Kong was starring in only experimental titles like Jungle Beat, Barrel Blast, and King of Swing—he hadn't been in a traditional platformer since the days of the Super NES. The varied levels and old-school challenge of Donkey Kong Country Returns prove that the big ape hasn't lost a step after all this time.



Little King's Story

PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: CING/TOWN FACTORY

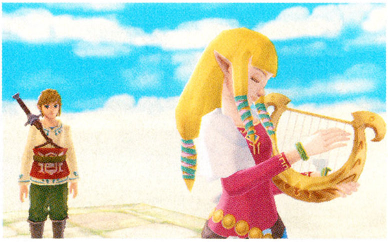
Little King's Story made the daunting world-building genre both intuitive and fun by having players literally throw their peasant workforce at the problems of their kingdom. A Zelda-like structure and an absurd sense of humor round out one of the Wii console's quirkiest and most imaginative titles.

Wii
METROID PRIME TRILOGY
COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Metroid Prime Trilogy

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS

Retro Studios did an amazing job of translating the exploration-based gameplay of the popular Metroid series from 2D to 3D. This collection brings together the three Metroid Prime games with improved graphics and updated Wii Remote controls for the first two entries (which were previously available only on GameCube). Metroid Prime Trilogy is somewhat difficult to find these days, but it's well worth the hunt.

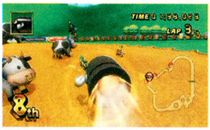


The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER: NINTENDO**

The Wii console's last true blockbuster did more than any game before it to deliver on the promise of motion control, with 1:1 sword slashes and myriad specialized controls for subitems. The game is also one of the storied series's biggest adventures, and its iterations of Link and Zelda rank among our favorites.

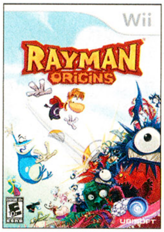
Wii
MARIOKART Wii



Mario Kart Wii

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

You can't really have a Nintendo system without a Mario Kart title, and the franchise is always good for intense multiplayer competition. Mario Kart Wii introduced motion control to the series, which made us rethink our old strategies (and gave us a slick wheel accessory for our Wii Remote). The game also marked the debut of motorcycles, which control quite differently than the standard karts. Whatever the vehicle, though, we are just happy to have another excuse to dive into a Balloon Battle.



Rayman Origins

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTPELLIER

Following a long hiatus, Rayman returned with this platforming masterpiece that reaches the same rarified heights as Mario's greatest. Its four-player co-op is a blast, the gorgeous visuals are matched by an equally amazing soundtrack, and the level designs are works of precision craftsmanship.

Wii
SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Super Mario Galaxy

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

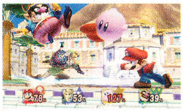
A platformer set in a galactic sea of planetoids—each with its own gravitational pull—is such a great idea that if Activision had come up with it, we'd be hailing Bubsy Galaxy as a classic. Fortunately, Nintendo got there first, and created the Wii console's greatest masterpiece by combining that inspired setting with the strong play mechanics and clever level design that Mario games are famous for.

Wii
SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

Super Smash Bros. Brawl

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

An expanded cast of heroes (including third-party favorites), online fisticuffs, a single-player platforming mode, and a 258-tune soundtrack by a legion of composers were only a few of the innovations in the newest Smash Bros. entry. Some of the gameplay changes were controversial, but no one can accuse Brawl of skimping on content.



WiiWARE ESSENTIALS

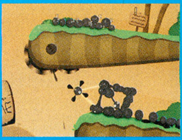
The Wii Shop Channel gives broadband users access to a wide variety of downloadable titles. Here are a few that no gamer should be without.

Castlevania: The Adventure ReBirth
Publisher: Konami
Wii Points: 1,000
ESRB: Teen

Cave Story
Publisher: Nicalis
Wii Points: 1,200
ESRB: Everyone 10+

Contra ReBirth
Publisher: Konami
Wii Points: 1,000
ESRB: Everyone 10+

Mega Man 10
Publisher: Capcom
Wii Points: 1,000
ESRB: Everyone



World of Goo
Publisher: 2D Boy
Wii Points: 1,500
ESRB: Everyone

Wii
TATSUNOKO VS. CAPCOM
CAPCOM

Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: EIGHTING

What happens when the heroes of Street Fighter, Viewtiful Joe, Darkstalkers, and Mega Man collide with the stars of anime powerhouse Tatsunoku Productions? You get one of the best fighting games on Wii. Despite its brain-melting supermoves, ridiculous combos, and relentless tag-team craziness, Tatsunoko vs. Capcom is nonetheless grounded in the precise 2D fighting that Capcom built its reputation on.

Wii
Xenoblade
CHRONICLES

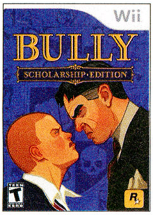
Xenoblade Chronicles

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT

Combining the smooth structure and storytelling of traditional Japanese RPGs with an innovative battle system and a vast world begging for exploration, Xenoblade Chronicles is the must-have role-playing experience on Wii. Gorgeous environments, tons of side quests, and a unique setting are just a few of the reasons why fans were so happy to see this title finally arrive in North America.

THE SHOULD-HAVES

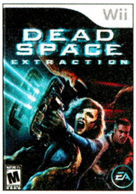
When you're ready to take your collection to the next level, these are the games to turn to. There's lots of variety here, from adorable pink puffballs to foul-mouthed assassins.



Bully: Scholarship Edition

PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR TORONTO**

One of the misconceptions about Bully is that it's about being a bully. It's not. It's about growing up, learning who you are, and making the most of a bad situation. How that plays out is largely up to you, but rest assured there will be plenty of action, exploration, fisticuffs, and boarding-school shenanigans in this contemporary adventure.



Dead Space: Extraction

PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EUROCOM/VISCERAL GAMES**

Wii has hosted its fair share of light-gun shooters, but M-rated Dead Space: Extraction is the cream of the crop. It's an incredibly immersive (and often terrifying) experience, elevated by an intriguing narrative and superbly acted characters. Plus, dismembering bloodthirsty space monsters is fun.

Wii
NO MORE HEROES 2
DESPERATE STRUGGLE

No More Heroes 2

PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE**

Take everything you liked about the first No More Heroes, strip out the tedious stuff, and throw in some 8-bit-style minigames, and you get this crazy-cool, over-the-top action game. Protagonist Travis Touchdown slices and dices his way through even more baddies than before to avenge his best friend's death—and perhaps more importantly, to get some, um, *affection* from femme fatale Sylvia Christel.

Whispy Woods
x04
x00
Fire
King Dedede
Meta Knight
Waddle Dee

Wii
Kirby's Return to Dream Land

Kirby's Return to Dream Land

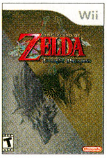
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **HAL LABORATORY**

Before the release of Kirby's Return to Dreamland, it had been quite a while since we'd gotten the traditional Kirby experience. But the ability-copying fun and the fan-favorite characters we've come to associate with the series make their glorious return in this fantastic platformer, which is at its best when you're playing with up to three friends.

Klonoa

PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **PAON**

Originally released for the PlayStation in 1998, an updated version of this charming platformer debuted on Wii in 2009. It's a fairly straightforward adventure, but Klonoa's ability to capture his enemies and use them as projectiles or double-jump-boosters makes running through the stages a treat. It also has a surprisingly emotional ending that reminded us just how attached we got to the game's silly cast of characters.



The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** **DEVELOPER:** **NINTENDO**

At the launch of the Wii system, this was the game that set the standard—and more than five years later, few games are even close to being in the same league. More mature than previous Legend of Zelda games, Twilight Princess delivers on all fronts, from an excellent story to incredible bosses to all-new Wii controls.

Punch-Out!!

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NEXT LEVEL GAMES**

When a game is exciting enough to merit two exclamation points in its title, you can bet that it will make our essentials list. Punch-Out!! is a sports game for people who don't like sports games. It features a cavalcade of wacky boxers to pummel, and gameplay that requires you to carefully watch your opponents and react to their movements. It's a true love letter to fans of the original NES hit.

Super Mario Galaxy 2

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**

Fans of the first Super Mario Galaxy will find its sequel to be mostly more of the same, but in this case that's a very, *very* good thing. While the space theme isn't as fresh, the levels are even better designed and feature small but significant new additions (Yoshi!).

VIRTUAL CONSOLE ESSENTIALS

We could argue for months about which Virtual Console games are the best, but these five unquestionably belong in any collection. Download them from the Wii Shop Channel.

Ultros
EDGAR 448
SABIN 270
TERRA 389
BANON 277

Final Fantasy III

Publisher: **Square Enix**
Wii Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past

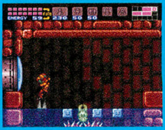
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Wii Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone**

The Revenge of Shinobi

Publisher: **Sega**
Wii Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

Super Mario World

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Wii Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone**



Super Metroid

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Wii Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone**

A: Check
B: Camera

Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure

PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** **DEVELOPER:** **CAPCOM**

It may not have the catchiest title, but don't let that scare you away from this unique gem. Zack & Wiki puts a new twist on the classic point-and-click adventure by building wonderfully creative puzzles around gesture controls. Hopefully Capcom gives the franchise another crack on Wii U.

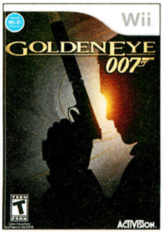
Sonic Colors

PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM**

With Sonic Colors, Sega turned in the Blue Blur's finest effort since the 16-bit era, largely by showing restraint. This game isn't afraid to slow things down once in a while, and clever power-ups enhance the franchise's traditional platforming rather than try to supplant it.

THE NICE-TO-HAVES

Still hungry for more? Those with an especially voracious appetite for interactive entertainment should round out their libraries with these fine offerings.



GoldenEye 007

PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **EUROCOM**

1997's GoldenEye 007 is one of the best Nintendo 64 games of all time, so Activision and Eurocom had a lot to live up to when they decided to reimagine and update the title for a 2010 audience. Fortunately, they succeeded handily with this graphically impressive, cinematic, and just-plain-entertaining first-person shooter.

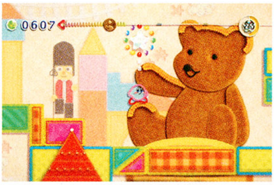
Wii
THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD
OVERKILL
SEGA

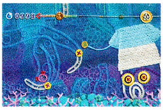
The House of the Dead: Overkill

PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **HEADSTRONG GAMES**

The video game equivalent of a grindhouse flick, this M-rated light-gun shooter gleefully pushes the envelope with its over-the-top violence and absurdly profane language. It's pretty much the definition of a guilty pleasure; stay far away if you're easily offended.

Wii
Kirby's
Epic Yarn

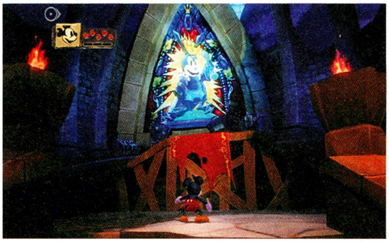


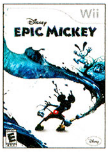


Kirby's Epic Yarn

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **GOOD-FEEL/HAL LABORATORY**

Kirby has always been adorable, but the little puffball has never looked cuter than in the aesthetically unique Kirby's Epic Yarn. Ot's not just the textile graphical style that makes this game great, though. This is a solid platformer that has plentiful fun surprises—especially when Kirby's super-transformations come into play.





Disney Epic Mickey

PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS**
DEVELOPER: **JUNCTION POINT**

It's not without flaws (primarily a clumsy camera), but famed game developer Warren Spector's take on Disney's beloved mouse is still a very enjoyable experience. Using Mickey's magic paintbrush to create and destroy objects within the environment leads to some clever puzzles, and the plot—which has Mickey exploring the forgotten realm of Wasteland and facing his rival, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit—is pretty darn engaging.

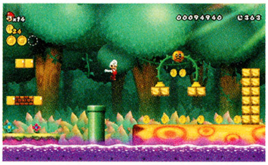
Wii
METROID
Other M

Metroid: Other M

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO/TEAM NINJA**

We admit that Metroid: Other M isn't perfect—the story leaves a lot to be desired, for instance—but that doesn't change the fact that the bulk of the game is pretty darn fun. The mix of exploration, shooting, and platforming is as brilliant as ever, and the powerful atmosphere will keep you on the edge of your seat.

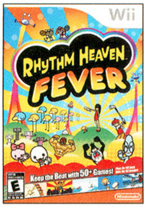
Wii
New SUPER MARIO BROS. Wii



New Super Mario Bros. Wii

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**

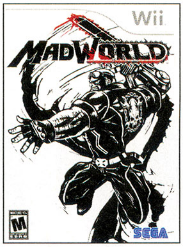
Everyone knows that Mario games are a blast, so how about a Mario game that you can enjoy with three of your buddies? At its core, New Super Mario Bros. Wii plays much like the original Super Mario Bros., but it introduces elements like the Propeller Mushroom and Penguin Suit to accompany the four-player simultaneous action.



Rhythm Heaven Fever

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

Golfing monkeys. Screwy robots. Seesaw testers. Romantic weasels. Tambourine-playing monkeys. Pigs in office chairs. Tiny, time-keeping monkeys. Sentient dough. Airborne badminton. Boxing action figures. Sweaty wrestlers. Candy-loving spiders. Dancing bacteria. Spirit-hunting samurai. Licking fish. Rolling seals. Manic baseball players. Synchronized birds. And plenty more. What else do you want out of a rhythm game?



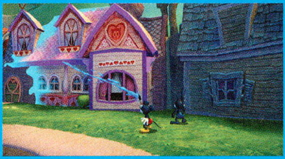
MadWorld

PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES

What's black and white and red all over? This Mature-rated, ultraviolent action title from the fine folks at PlatinumGames. With its *Sin City*-inspired visuals and its creative ways to dispatch foes (you can use a spiked baseball bat to smack enemies into a giant dartboard, for example), the for-mature-audiences-only MadWorld is unlike anything else on Wii.

FUTURE ESSENTIALS?

Most of the buzz these days surrounds the upcoming Wii U console, but there are still some exciting titles coming to its predecessor. Here are the ones we think could earn a spot on future versions of this list.



Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two
Publisher: **Disney**
Developer: **Junction Point**
Release: **Fall 2012**

The Last Story
Publisher: **Xseed**
Developer: **Mistwalker**
Release: **Summer 2012**

Skylanders: Giants
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Toys for Bob**
Release: **Fall 2012**

Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: CLIMAX STUDIOS

A reimagining of the original Silent Hill, Shattered Memories takes some bold risks. Not all of them pay off (we're looking at you, chase sequences), but it's an experience that proves greater than the sum of its parts, and the surprise ending ranks among our all-time favorites.

Sin & Punishment: Star Successor

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: TREASURE

Action doesn't get more hardcore than in Sin & Punishment: Star Successor. The combat is relentless, the level of challenge is high, and the bosses are utterly insane. But this game is no mere button-masher; its ever-shifting stages are full of clever gimmicks and you'll learn new tricks and tactics every time you play.

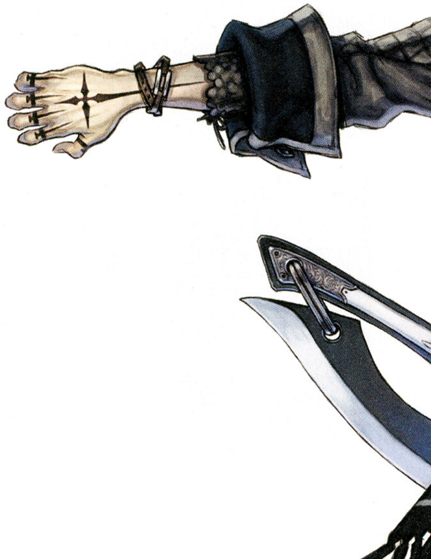
Storied History

An exclusive peek into Mistwalker's vault offers fascinating insights into the creative process that birthed The Last Story for Wii.

In 2007, Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi and his team at Mistwalker were already hard at work on what would become their Wii RPG debut. It would star an edgy surfer with a tainted stigmata, and he would win the love of a blind princess who weeps tears of blood. Together they would battle otherworldly mutants with a squad of pistol-packing sidekicks. It would be called The Last World.

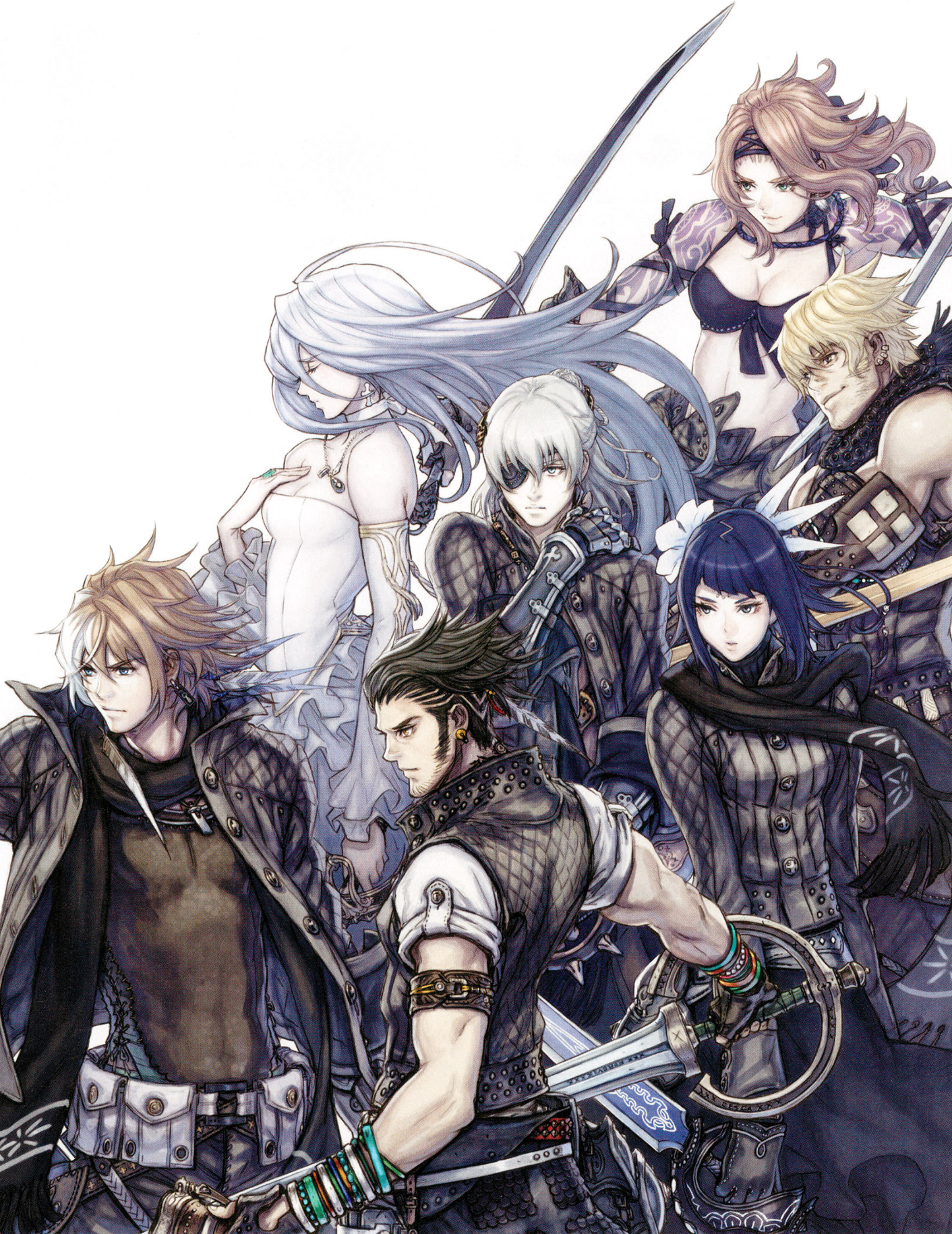
By the time The Last Story was unveiled to the public, a great deal more than its title had changed. The guns were replaced with swords, the sci-fi setting gave way to a more resonant high-fantasy world, and the game's cast of edgy misfits, tortured princesses, and traitorous comrades had evolved into a lovable brotherhood of mercenary heroes.

It's not unusual for games to change dramatically over the course of development, but it is unusual to get to see how it happened. So we were thrilled to have a chance to speak with The Last Story concept artist and character designer Kimihiko Fujisaka about his inspiration for each member of the game's cast, and to get a glimpse of his original vision of a much darker world.



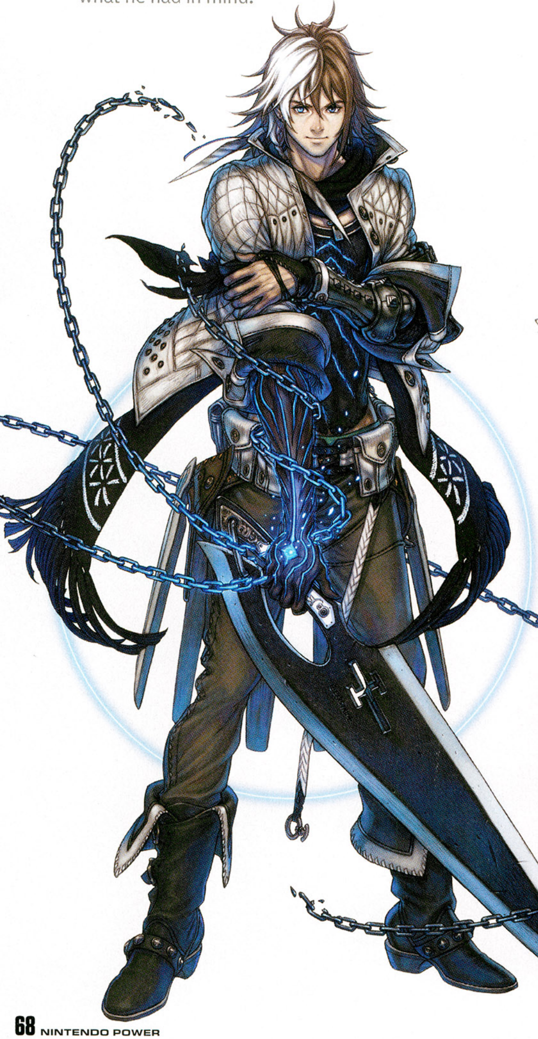
BY **CASEY LOE**

PUBLISHER: **XSEED** DEVELOPER: **MISTWALKER** RELEASE: **SUMMER 2012** Wii



Zael

Protagonist Zael fell in with a band of mercenaries after he lost his family at a young age. He dreams of rising above his station to become a royal knight, but his first brush with the nobility will be quite far from what he had in mind.

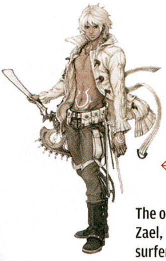


DESIGNER'S NOTES

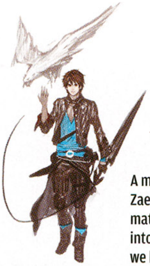
"For the hero, we wanted a very conventional sort of main character. At one point, we dramatically changed the entire plan for the game, and before that, Zael was a surfer and had kind of an older brother-type vibe, and was a lot edgier-looking. As I recall, it took a lot of work to get him from where he was then to where he is now.

"My plan for the new design was to have him appear delicate on the surface but with a strong inner fortitude. But as we started working him into the game, he ended up evolving into more of an easygoing type of character. I was quite surprised at where he ended up.

"In the game, the heroes are mercenaries in a world in which their occupation is regarded with derision. So I wanted them to be cool, but took care to make sure that they didn't come off as refined or cosmopolitan. The feathers in Zael's hair give him a unique and unconventional touch while expressing the strength of his bond with his best friend, Dagran."



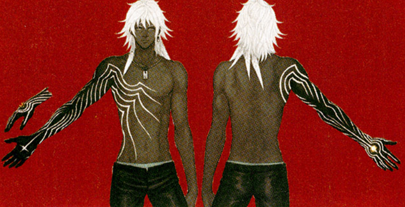
The original Zael, in all his surfer glory.



A more delicate Zael, who ultimately evolved into the version we know and love.

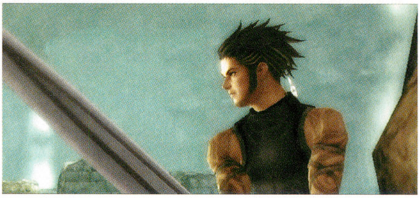
TAMING THE STIGMATA

"Zael's right hand is infused with a mysterious power, which is why it's covered with a strange pattern," Fujisaka explains. "In one of the earlier versions of the game, a giant eyeball would open in the center of the pattern, and Zael's flesh would turn jet-black—it looked pretty creepy. Personally, I would have loved to have been able to keep that in the game." The game's concept art reveals dozen of "stigmata" designs, ranging from elaborate patterns to an open wound oozing tainted blood. Bleah.



Dagran

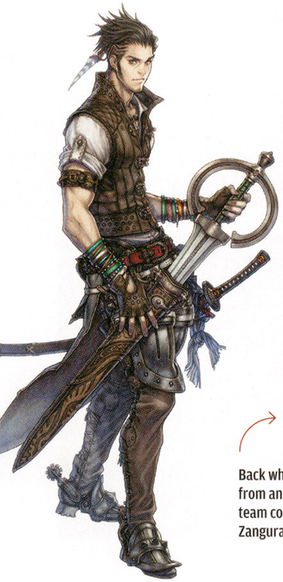
Dagran is the leader of the mercenary band to which Zael belongs, and serves as a best friend and mentor to the game's young protagonist.

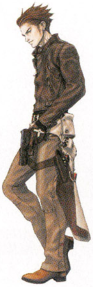


DESIGNER'S NOTES

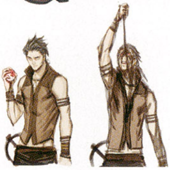
"This is my personal favorite among the character designs. I'm pretty confident that I nailed the image of 'a leader of men with a bit of a dark shadow.' The intended ages of all of the characters gradually increased throughout the design process, and while the final version of Dagran has a very adult feel to him, he was originally going to be a teenager when the project began. I particularly liked his design from that era, when he had sort of a 'delinquent older brother' vibe to him.

"Since players are free to change the clothing of the characters they use throughout the game, we needed to make sure that they each had recognizable features in their face and head. Since players usually see the characters from behind, these features needed to be visible from the backs of their heads, so everyone needed to have distinctive hair colors and styles. Dagran's hairstyle is one of my favorites."





In the more sci-fi version of the game, Dagran was a double agent who wielded twin pistols.



Back when the Gathering ability came from an eye embedded in one's hand, the team considered having Dagran crush Zangurak's eye to gain its power. Oh my.

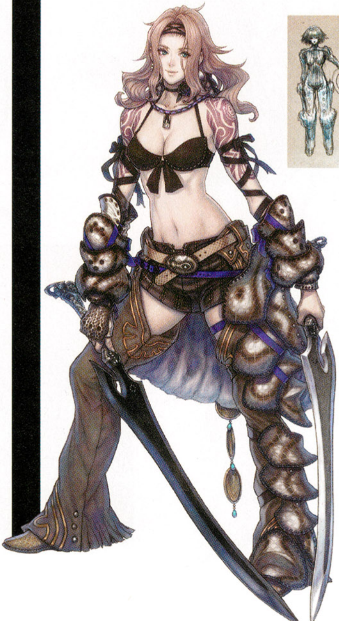
Syrenne

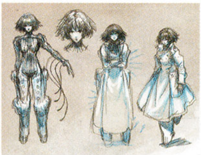
Passionate, volatile, and often drunk, Syrenne is a powerful force of nature whether she's hacking through foes on the battlefield or partying at the pub.

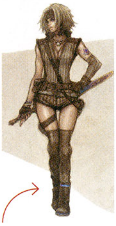
DESIGNER'S NOTES

"The description for Syrenne was 'a hearty and high-spirited elder-sister type of character'—sort of a more refined Amazon warrior, if you will. She's in vigorous health and shows a lot of skin, but is actually sort of innocent at heart, and I wanted to design her around that contradiction in her personality. I made it so that if you look at her carefully, the details paint a conflicting picture; she has tattoos on her arms but a rose corsage around her neck. I thought about giving her African tribal tattoos to reflect her Amazon image, but in the end, went with Thai-flavored Asian tattoos. I'm still kind of conflicted about whether that was the right choice.

"From my designer's perspective, she may be the most beautiful woman in the game. Or at least, I tried to make her that way. She fights with two swords, and I think she has the best character animation of them all."



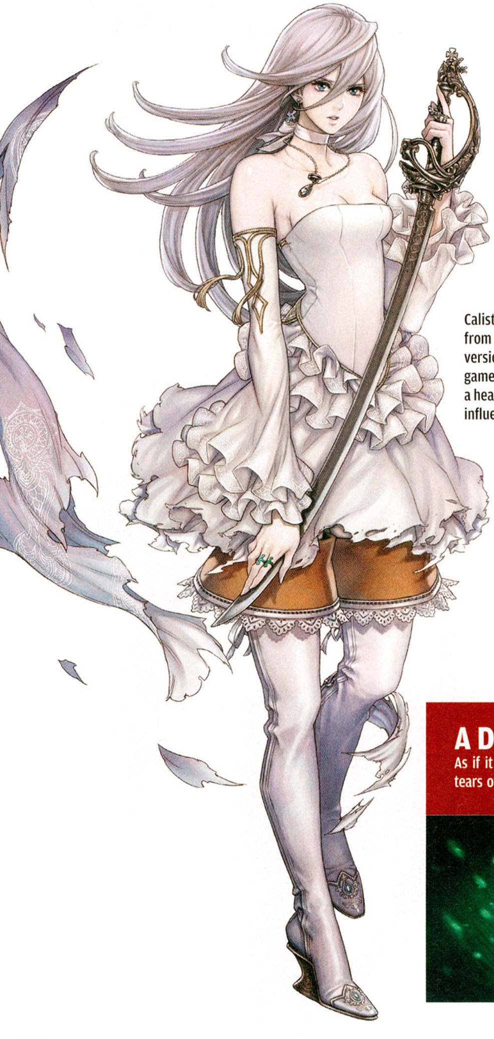




The team seems to have explored the idea of giving Syrenne high-tech weapons and armor, but abandoned the idea. Even in the sci-fi era, she ultimately wielded a sword.

Calista

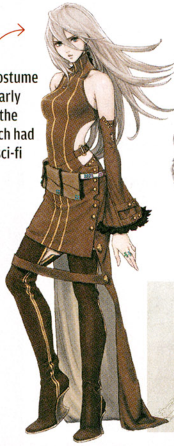
Calista is the heir to the family that rules the game's Lazulis Island setting, making her an invaluable prize to all the kingdom's political schemers. Her uncle—the island's current ruler—knows her value well, and won't be offering her hand in marriage cheaply.



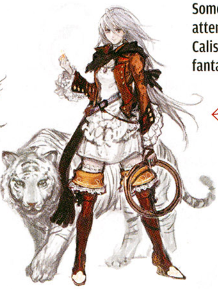
DESIGNER'S NOTES

"As with the hero, we wanted a very archetypal heroine. You could consider her to be a projection of my own mental image of a 'princess,' and that image remained consistent throughout the entire design process. As I recall, when I showed the very first rough sketches to Mr. Sakaguchi, he said it was pretty much what he had had in mind as well. That said, she ended up being one of the toughest characters to design, simply because she went through a ridiculous amount of costumes. I spent a lot of time and effort designing things like wedding dresses that ended up being cut—although in retrospect, maybe that was for the best?

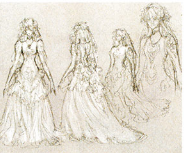
"Incidentally, the necklace she wears is from her mother, and the ring attached to the necklace is a memento of her father."



Calista's costume from the early version of the game, which had a heavier sci-fi influence.

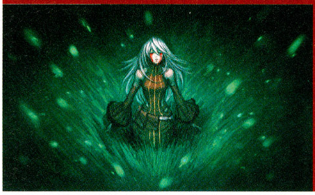


Some early attempts to adapt Calista to the new fantasy setting.



Some of the game's unused wedding-dress designs.

A DARKER FATE IN STORE



As if it weren't bad enough that Calista was originally intended to be blind and weeping tears of blood, the original plans for the game had the villainous Zangurak inflicting dark rituals upon Calista to steal the power of her lineage. This didn't sit well with her many fans on the development team, including her designer. "Originally, all sorts of terrible things were going to happen to Calista after she was captured by Zangurak," says Fujisaka. "I'm really glad that none of that made it into the final game!"

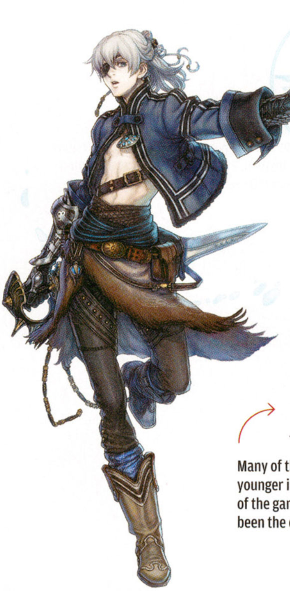
Yurick

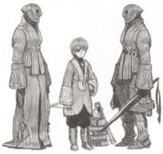
Young Yurick didn't join Dagran's mercenary band to make friends. He simply wants to use his prodigious magical abilities to earn a paycheck, and then be left alone.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

"The direction for Yurick was 'a young magic user in a shroud of darkness, who doesn't open his heart to others.' And also he wears a mysterious eye patch. That's quite a lot to capture in one design, but creating Yurick went surprisingly smoothly. For a character designed around a dark mood, Yurick ended up becoming oddly cute as the design progressed, which really shocked me. I guess that even with all that baggage, you can be quite lovable.

"The secret as to how Yurick became so powerful at such a young age can be found beneath his eye patch. In his backstory, Yurick worked hard to acquire a powerful source of magic that he implanted in his right eye. But he ended up spending much of his youth alone, believing that he had been betrayed by his father. Of all the main characters, I think that he may have had the most difficult upbringing."





Many of the main characters were much younger in one of the earlier versions of the game. Could this little boy have been the original Yurick?

Lowell

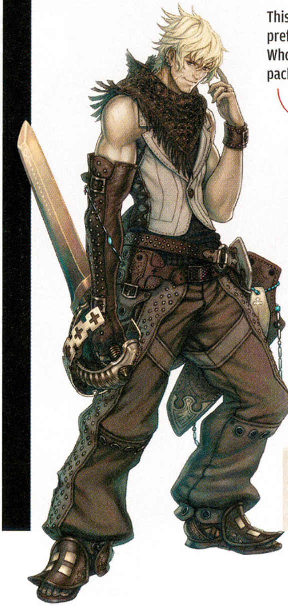
Lowell can wield a blade as skillfully as his powerful ice spells, but prefers to save his A game for when he's chatting up the ladies.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

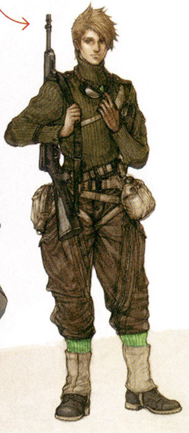
"The concept for Lowell was 'a conceited mage knight,' so I made him with a macho, western feel, the idea being that if The Last Story was a Hollywood movie, he'd be the sort of character they'd want in the lead role. He may be macho, but he has a lot of depth, and a lot of characteristics—like the fact that he used to be nobility—that would have made him a good lead character. Nevertheless, he may be the character who gets the least screen time.

"Lowell often bickers with Syrenne, so I tried to design them to look good together, but I think that it's a little too much to see them side by side. I do think that the role of comedy relief suited him well, and I'm quite fond of the way he turned out.

"Note that Lowell is wearing both a vest and a V-neck sweater vest. Somehow, this doesn't look as strange as I thought it would. But if I could redo him, I'd definitely reduce his jawline a bit."

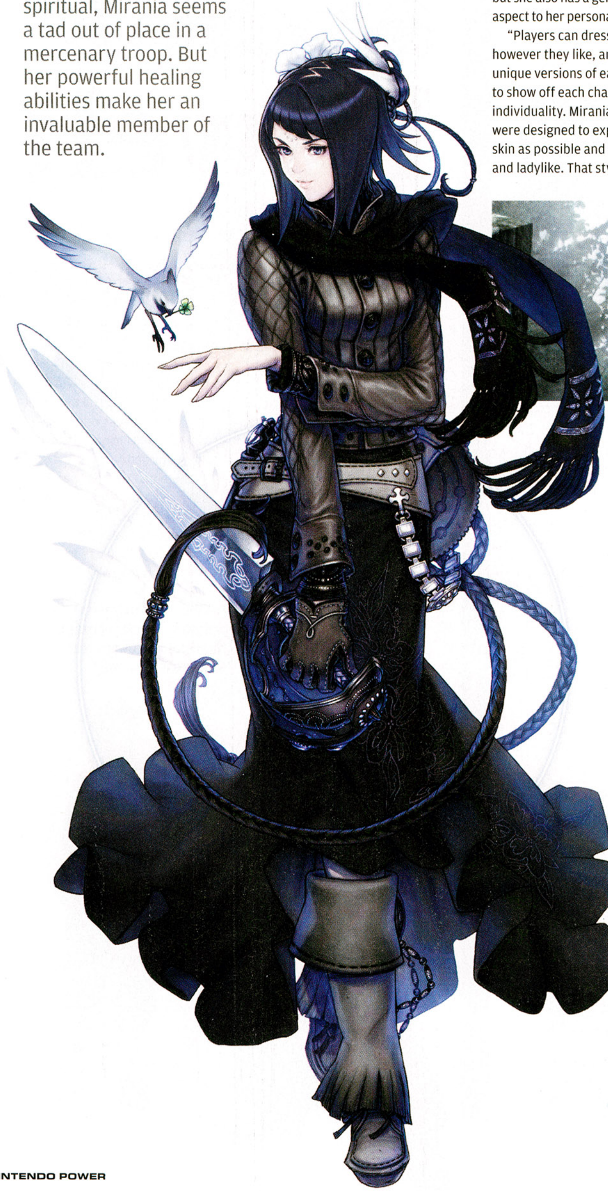


This soldier seems to be the prefantasy iteration of Lowell. Who needs magic when you're packing this much heat?



Mirania

Quiet, cool, and deeply spiritual, Mirania seems a tad out of place in a mercenary troop. But her powerful healing abilities make her an invaluable member of the team.

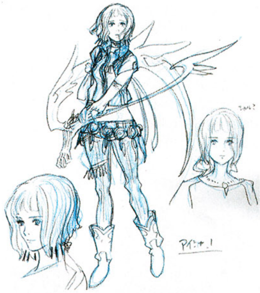


DESIGNER'S NOTES

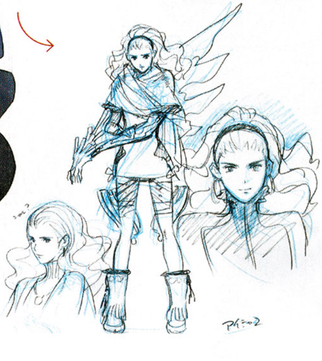
"Mirania is a character who had an extremely unusual upbringing, and as a result, isn't comfortable expressing any of her emotions. In other words, she comes off as weird, but she also has a gentle, older-sister aspect to her personality.

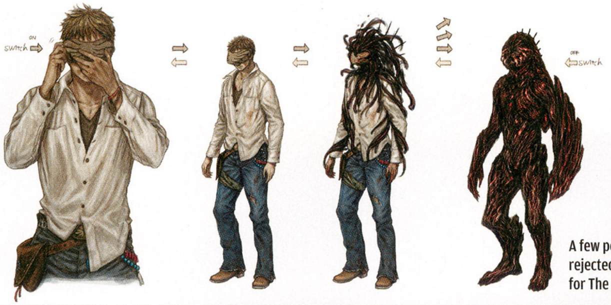
"Players can dress characters however they like, and we created unique versions of each costume to show off each character's individuality. Mirania's costumes were designed to expose as little skin as possible and seem adult and ladylike. That style of dress, combined with her straight black hair, strongly suggest the flavor of a Japanese woman from the classical era. However, she was not intended to be Japanese.

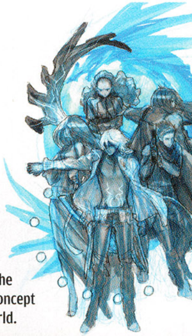
"I spent a lot of time on the tiny details of her hair—the way her bangs hang, and the elaborate way her hair is tied in the back—but I feel like I wasn't able to do a good job of making it visible in the game itself. Nevertheless, I was relieved to see that she has proven to be an extremely popular character, both among players and members of the development team."



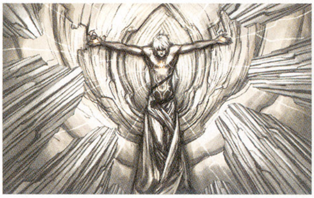
Mirania seems not to have existed in the early versions of the game. Instead, Fujisaka was working on a different female character named Aisha.

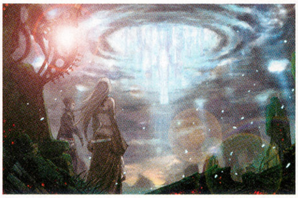


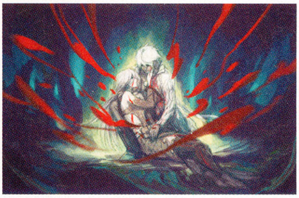




A few peeks at the rejected 2007 concept for The Last World.



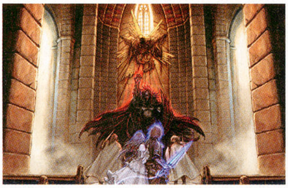




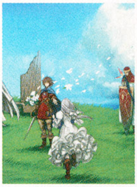
Postcards From the Last World

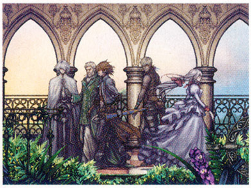
The earliest images of The Last Story have a distinct science-fiction flavor, but are also mixed with fantastical elements like dragons. As Sakaguchi explains, "The [game] was set in the future, where the hero was part of a military unit, and the story started with him coming down from a helicopter." The worldview was darker and more tragic in tone; Fujisaka describes most of the concept art he had created as "bleak."

So what happened? Nintendo, the game's Japanese publisher, simply didn't like it. Sakaguchi and Fujisaka went back to the drawing board, and within a few months, reworked the characters, game mechanics, and elements of the story into a more conventional fantasy setting. Months of work were lost, but Sakaguchi doesn't regret that it happened. As he explained in a publicity interview with Nintendo CEO Satoru Iwata, "by simplifying the game world and giving it a fantasy setting, we were able to give the characters more depth. It's actually easier to bring out realistic human dimensions in a fantasy setting."



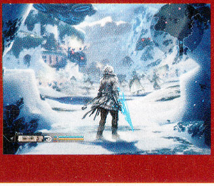
By the end of 2007, the team had adapted to a brighter, high-fantasy style that ultimately evolved into the version of The Last Story we know today—save for Dagran's ill-advised flirtation with a blond dye job. To see the final phase of the game's evolution, pick up a copy this summer, when it finally sees a North American release courtesy of Xseed.

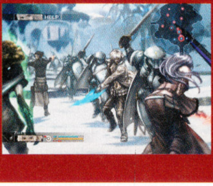


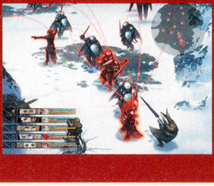


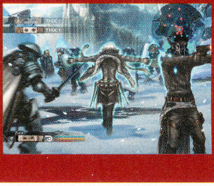
THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

While the world and characters of The Last Story were drastically redesigned, the game's core mechanics have never needed a reboot. Early target illustrations show combat mechanics that are surprisingly similar to the final product's—albeit with a bit more gunplay.









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Power Profiles

DATE OF BIRTH
March 28, 1974

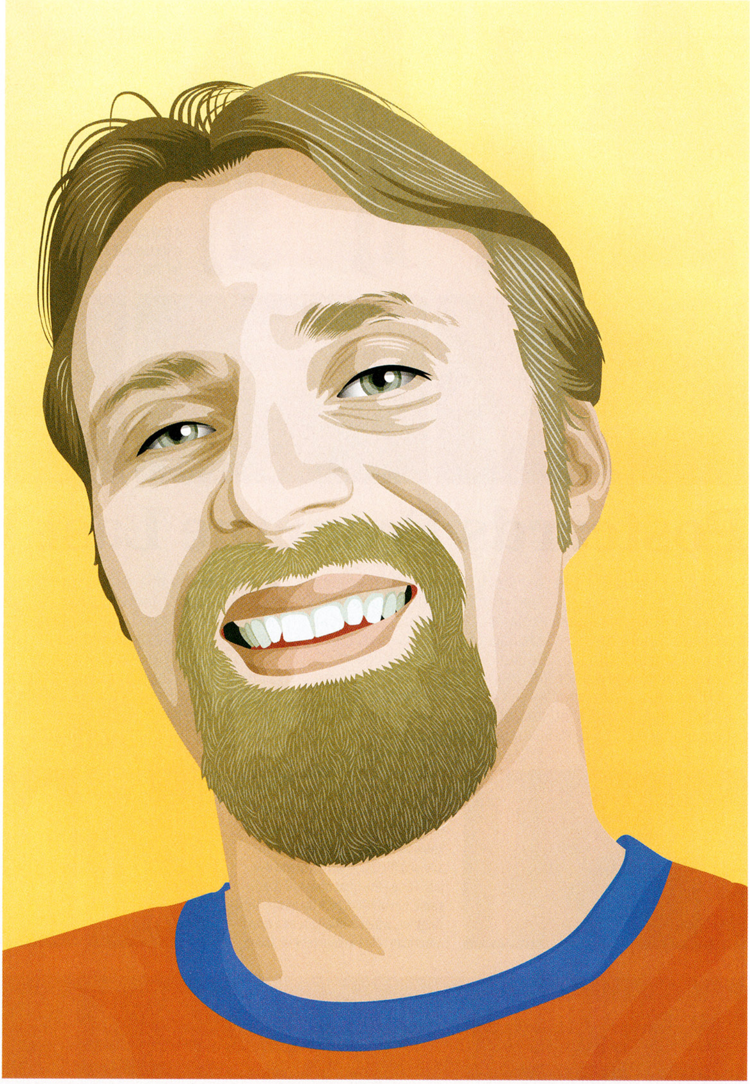
BIRTHPLACE
Clacton-on-Sea, United Kingdom

POSITION
Cofounder and director, Renegade Kid

BEST KNOWN FOR
Creating top-notch games for Nintendo handhelds; making us soil our trousers with the Dementium series

FAVORITE FOOD
Indian

CURRENT PROJECTS
Bomb Monkey, unannounced titles



Jools Watsham

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Support for dedicated gaming handhelds comes predominantly from Japan these days, but there are still a few Western developers bringing quality entertainment to our favorite portables. Among them is the Austin, Texas-based Renegade Kid, led by industry veteran Jools Watsham. The studio first garnered attention with 2007's Dementium: The Ward—a freshman effort that delivered surprisingly effective first-person horror on the diminutive screens of the Nintendo DS. Most recently, Watsham and company won critical acclaim for sprite-based side-scroller Mutant Mudds, demonstrating their versatility in the process. To find out what Renegade Kid has in store next, be sure to keep an eye on future issues of NP.

NINTENDO POWER **How did you get into the video game business?**

JOOLS WATSHAM One crisp spring afternoon, in London, England, I was wandering around Farringdon Lane on my lunch break from graphic-design college when I happened upon a rather large, impressive building. The plaque outside read "EMAP Images." Being an avid fan of video game magazines, I instantly knew what stood before me. EMAP Images were responsible for many of the great UK video game magazines of that time, including a fan favorite called *The One*. As luck would have it, I had a copy of the latest issue of *The One* on me!

What I like about this moment is that it marks a very important junction in my life. Do I nod my head and think to myself, "How cool!" and continue to walk by or do I pluck up the courage to walk inside and ask for a job? I think you already know what happened next....

I got the job because I was enthusiastic and willing to accept an annual salary of £6,500! This was the break I needed to enter the industry that I had dreamed of being a part of since I was a young lad.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I grew up wanting to make video games.

You started your career in game development as an artist. How did you transition to the design side of things?

Yes, my first job on the development side was as a pixel artist for games on the NES, SNES, and Genesis. At the time, the game-designer role didn't exist in an official capacity. The design aspect was handled by the programmers and/or artists on a project. It wasn't until I joined Iguana that the design role was being handled by dedicated individuals. I spent a few years focusing on the art side until I decided that game design was something I really desired to be a part of. I was thrown into the deep end with a project-manager role on a Nintendo 64 title called Iggy's Reckin' Balls. The project-manager role was a very challenging one because it combined the duties of the producer and lead designer into a single role.

What made you decide to start your own independent studio with Renegade Kid?

I worked with a number of different companies before starting Renegade Kid, and always felt that my hands were tied. I wanted to make different types of games, and I wanted to approach the development of the games in a different way than the studios allowed or understood. It was quite frustrating at times to be so confined. I value the experience I gained from working at the studios, and I value the wonderful people I was fortunate enough to work with, but I always felt that I needed to go independent. The day we started Renegade Kid was the day that I felt my career had really started. The 16 years in the industry that led up to that day was invaluable training that helped me avoid falling flat on my face with my own studio.

Renegade Kid made its mark with Dementium and Moon—games that were all about creating tension and making the player feel uneasy. By contrast, your more recent titles are decidedly lighthearted. Was that a conscious shift you wanted to make, and if so, why?

We like to play different types of games and we like to make different types of games, too. I never expected us to develop three first-person shooters for the DS; that quickly pigeon-holed us as the bringers of blood on the DS, which is a badge we wore with honor. After Dementium II we started to break out of that mold with ATV Wild Ride.

The studio has also started focusing more on downloadable titles, specifically through the Nintendo eShop. What prompted that and what have you learned from the experience?

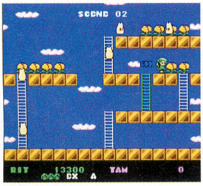
Mutant Mudds was a test subject for the eShop, and it passed the test! This is a great way to start our entry into publishing. I have wanted to create a 2D platformer for more than 20 years, and the eShop is the perfect place for it. It was relatively low-risk for us, because we did not overinvest in the development of the game. It was just three of us working on the game: Matthew Gambrell, Troupe Gammage, and me. I handled art and design. Matthew programmed the game and tools. And Troupe wrote all of the music.

What I've learned from this is that developing a game completely independent of outside influence from publishers is a wonderful thing. We were able to make the game we wanted, for the reasons we wanted, on the timeline we needed. It is important to keep the cost of an eShop game under control in the hope that profit will come, especially as the eShop audience is so new. I expect it will continue to increase in size and activity over time as the N3DS sells more units and more people become aware of the eShop. Selling retail games via the eShop will help a lot with this.

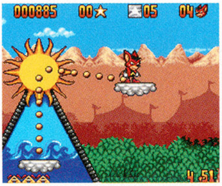
Are you interested in revisiting the first-

GAMEOGRAPHY

Before cofounding Renegade Kid, Watsham contributed to more than 30 games for a variety of publishers. He served in a number of roles during that period, starting out as a pixel artist and animator.



RODLAND
1993, NES (EUROPE ONLY)
PIXEL ARTIST, ANIMATOR



AERO THE ACROBAT
1993, SUPER NES
ARTIST, ANIMATOR

IGGY'S RECKIN' BALLS
1998, NINTENDO 64
LEAD DESIGNER, PRODUCER

TUROK 2: SEEDS OF EVIL
1998, NINTENDO 64
SENIOR DESIGNER

Power Profiles

person horror genre at some point?
Absolutely. I really enjoyed working on the Dementium games. I am not sure how likely it is that we'll ever develop a new Dementium or Moon game, as they are tied to the publishers who have to front the cash, but we would like to develop a new original first-person horror title someday to avoid those issues.

As someone who works on both the business and creative sides of things at Renegade Kid, do you ever have arguments with yourself?
Ha—yes, I suppose I do. But I always have a clear goal in mind with each game, so choosing the right path is not usually a big issue. However, when in doubt it is always good to get advice from your team members. No individual can have all of the answers. It is amazing how much other people can add to an idea in a way you could never have imagined.

Renegade Kid has worked exclusively on handheld games. Has that been by choice? And if so, what is it that appeals to you about handhelds?
Starting out with Dementium on the DS was definitely a conscious decision, but since then we have always been open to the idea of working on other platforms. Personally, I love working on handheld platforms. Handhelds are my choice of gaming platform for my playing needs. They fit my lifestyle. Even though I own a NeoGeo Pocket, PSP, and such, I find myself always more drawn to Nintendo's handhelds because of the design of the hardware and the incredible first-party games.

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?
Almost everything has changed, I think. The Internet barely existed way back when I started. The craft of making games has changed a lot on one hand, but has perhaps fallen behind on the other hand. When you think of some of the games released in the 16-bit era... you realize the amount of work and talent required to produce titles like Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Contra III, Demon's Crest, and of course first-party games like Super Mario World and Sonic the Hedgehog. These were amazing achievements, regardless of their 2D-ness. The game design and overall production quality of those games was incredible.

> *"Developing a game completely independent of...influence from publishers is a wonderful thing."*

Even though I think much of the industry has continued to improve on their craft from a development point of view, the market has been forced into one that churns out a lot of average-quality games due to the relationship between publishers and retail. While retail outlets continue to control the games that the public can buy, we'll continue to see games that battle for a very narrow market of what the retailers think the public wants to buy. The dawn of digital distribution has a chance to change all of this and allow developers and publishers to get back to making good games simply because they're good, and because people simply want to buy good games.

What aspect of the video game-development process do you enjoy the most?
I really enjoy all phases of development, but if I had to choose one it might have to be the beginning dream phase. I like it when anything is possible and we're just riffing on ideas to fill out the scope of the game design. This is where magical ideas can happen that completely define the games' heart and soul.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while working on a game, what's your process for working through it?
Forget about it. Just walk away. I find that getting perspective on an idea is really important if you're stumped. I'll either work on a different task to keep me going, or even take a leisurely stroll to the mailbox to get some fresh air and listen to the birds. I find that a lot of the time the answer will come when you're not consciously thinking of the problem. It is amazing what the subconscious mind can do!

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
The two creators that I respect the most are Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi. They worked closely together in the early days of Nintendo... and Mr. Yokoi went on to primarily handle Kid Icarus and Metroid. Mr. Miyamoto's continued work with the Mario and Zelda series has been incredible, always inspiring new ideas. Without Gunpei we wouldn't have had the Game Boy or Virtual Boy. Both machines revolutionized the industry in many ways. I have the deepest respect for both of these creators. I wouldn't be where I am today without them.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you enjoy?
I really admire the movies that both Steven Spielberg and Ridley Scott have made, and continue to make. They're both incredibly good at creating believable worlds with believable characters.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
Playing video games.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
I think flight would be an exciting, and helpful, superpower to have. It would certainly make my trips to E3 each year a little easier.

GAMEOGRAPHY

HP:
BOMB:
NEXT: 000
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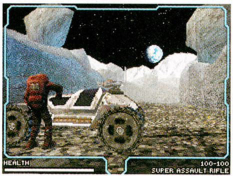
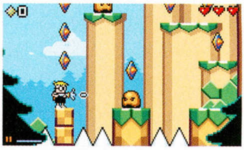
99

SIGMA STAR SAGA
2005, GAME BOY ADVANCE
ARTIST

DEMENTIUM: THE WARD
2007, NINTENDO DS
GAME DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, DESIGNER, MUSIC, AUDIO



MOON
2009, NINTENDO DS
GAME DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, DESIGNER, AUDIO



MUTANT MUDDS
2012, NINTENDO 3DS
GAME DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, DESIGNER, ARTIST

“DID SOMEBODY PAGE THE KING OF AWESOME?”

—BOWSER, MARIO & LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY, 2009

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MEDIA WITH PASSION

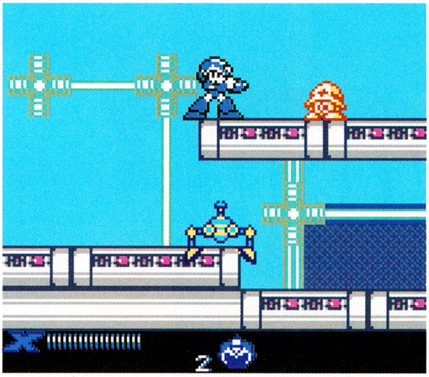
"Touch my saber. I dare ya!"

GAME BOY COLOR
MEGAMAN Xtreme
CAPCOM

Mega Man Xtreme

Mega Man doesn't get mad. He gets Xtreme.

PLATFORM: **GAME BOY COLOR**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE DATE: **JANUARY 2001**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **138, 140**
MISSING Es: **1**



X is preparing to do what he does best: destroy rogue robots.

Upon hearing the title Mega Man Xtreme, one might envision Mega Man copping a 'tude, hitting the half-pipe, and chugging Mountain Dew. Fortunately, that's not the case. Rather, Mega Man Xtreme is a portable hybrid of Super NES titles Mega Man X and Mega Man X2—and a very good one at that.

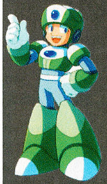
According to the game's story, evil robots have hacked the Maverick Hunters' central computer and used its data of past battles to plunge the world into chaos. It's not the most gripping plot ever, but it provides a fine excuse for players to take control of robotic blue hero Mega Man X and revisit the stages and enemies from his previous adventures. Storm Eagle, Chill Penguin, Spark Mandrill, and Armored Armadillo from the original Mega Man X are all represented, alongside Flame Stag, Magna Centipede, Wheel Gator, and Morph Moth from X2. The stages aren't exact representations of their Super NES counterparts—these are 16-bit levels modified to work on Game Boy Color, after all—but they come pretty darn close, and they offer all the hazards you'd expect from a Mega Man game, including moving platforms, lethal lava, deadly spikes, and the occasional miniboss. Naturally, X has all of his trademark tricks, as well—his charge shot, his wall jump, his dash, and the power to use the weapons of defeated bosses—and he can get even stronger by finding hidden upgrades in each stage.

But don't think Mega Man Xtreme offers only rehashed material. Though most of the sights and sounds are familiar, it also brings new narrative elements and characters to the table. Additionally, it features a unique structure. The first time you play through the game, you face only four of the bosses before heading to the final areas; after the credits roll, you can play the game in Hard mode, which provides a different set of levels and bosses. Once that's conquered, you'll unlock Xtreme mode, which allows you to play through every stage and face every boss in one complete package. Though some might be annoyed at having to beat the game three times to get the full experience, there's no question that it adds replay value.

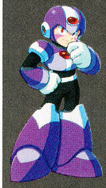
What Mega Man Xtreme lacks in innovation it more than makes up for in fun. It's easily one of the best games released for Game Boy Color, and we certainly wouldn't mind seeing it on Virtual Console some day. —**CHRIS H.**

MEET THE XTREMISTS

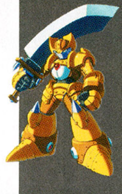
Despite containing stages and bosses from previous Mega Man games, Mega Man Xtreme also features some new characters. Here's a brief look.



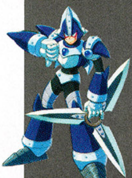
MIDDY
Supposedly the world's best computer programmer. He helps the Maverick Hunters.



TECHNO
Middy's twin brother. He hacks into the Maverick Hunters' computer while under Sigma's influence.



ZAIN
Known as a Shadow Hunter, Zain is a skilled swordsman with powerful leaping attacks.



GEEMEL
Zain's Shadow Hunter partner. He has ninjalike abilities and attacks with a huge shuriken.

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Juri P
Lakeside, CA

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REVIEWS

IN THIS SECTION

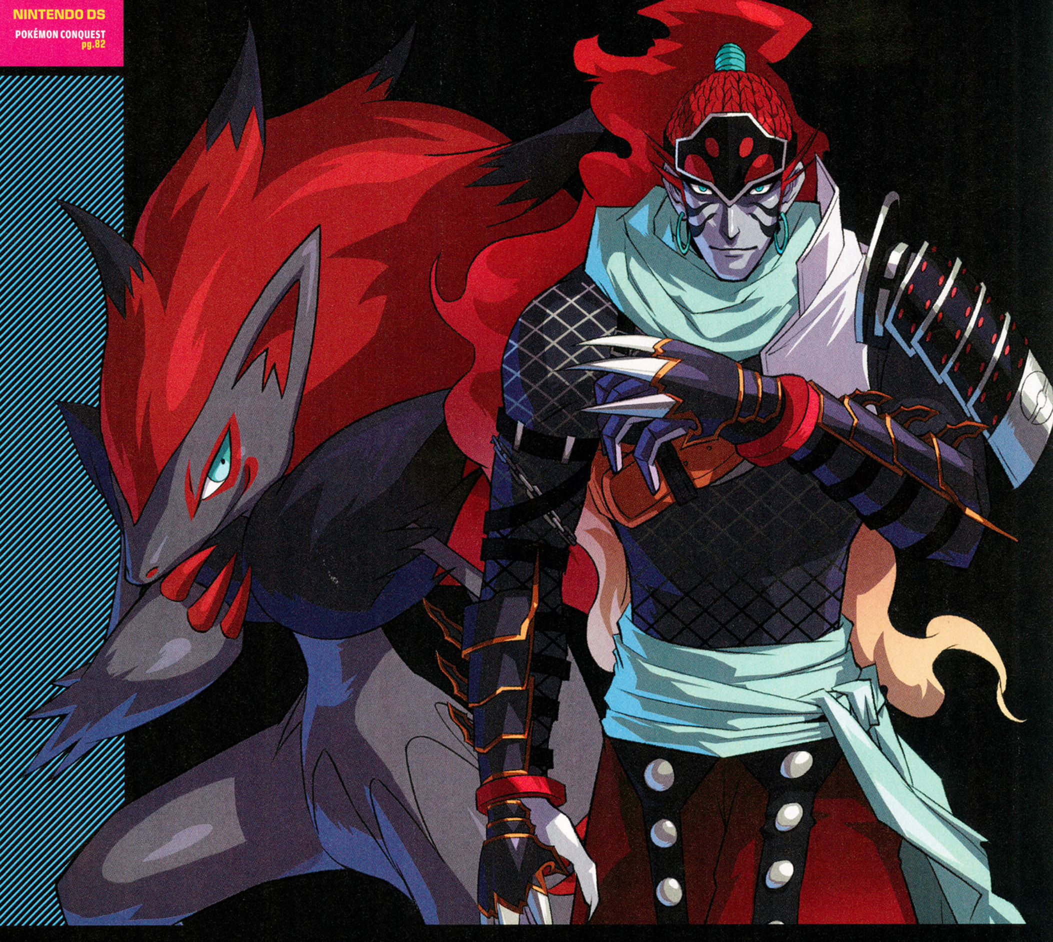
NINTENDO 3DS

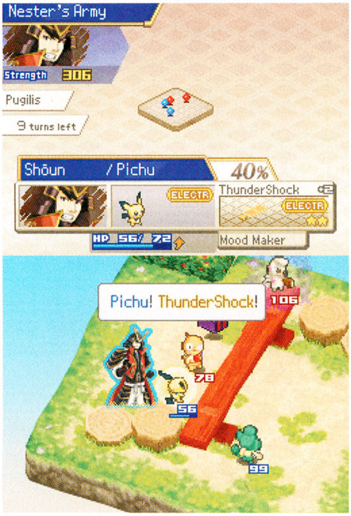
RAYMAN ORIGINS pg.86

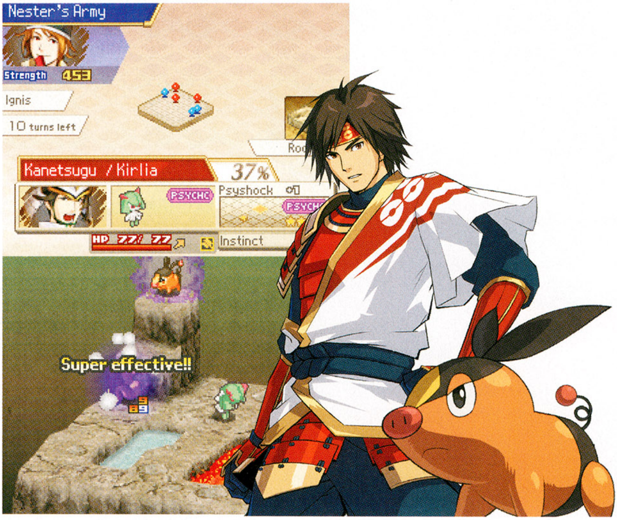
NINTENDO DS

POKÉMON CONQUEST pg.82

The Dark-type Pokémon Zoroark working together with the chaos-loving ninja Kotaro Fuma? The worlds of Pokémon and Nobunaga's Ambition collide as you rewrite history in Pokémon Conquest for Nintendo DS.




Nester's Army
Strength 306
Pugilis
9 turns left
Shōun / Pichu
40%
ELECTR
ThunderShock
ELECTR
HP 56/ 72
Mood Maker
Pichu! ThunderShock!
106
78
56
99


Nester's Army
Strength 453
Ignis
10 turns left
Kanetsugu / Kirlia
37%
PSYCHC
Psyshock
HP 77/ 77
Instinct
Super effective!!

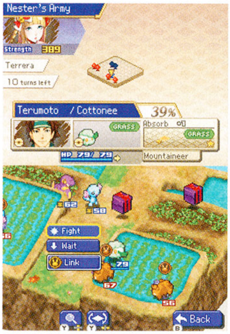
Winning Strategy

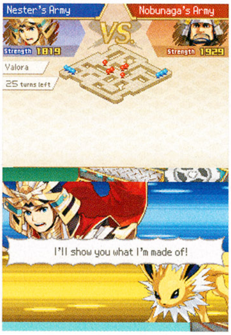
POKÉMON CONQUEST

9.0 Pokémon Conquest is a mashup of the Pokémon universe and Nobunaga's Ambition, a popular series of strategy games that originated in Japan way back in 1983. The Nobunaga titles—which are usually set during Japan's Sengoku period spanning the 15th and 16th centuries—have appeared on multiple platforms over the years, including the NES, Super NES, and Game Boy. The goal is to unify the country under the rule of the legendary warlord Oda Nobunaga. Pokémon Conquest, understandably, deviates from this historical premise, taking characters inspired by Japan's real-life historical figures and placing them in the Ransei region, an area dominated by several castles and, of course, inhabited by a variety of Pokémon.

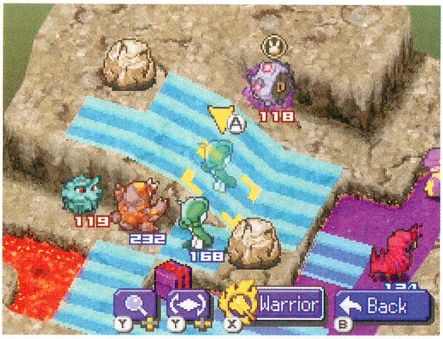
The pairing of the whimsical world of Pokémon with an established strategy franchise that has spent nearly 30 years grounded in reality is unexpected, to say the least. Surprisingly, though, it works rather well. Through their appearances in over-the-top action titles like Samurai Warriors 3, these military leaders' lore has already grown a bit exaggerated, so why not toss Mewtwo into the mix?

For those accustomed to the standard Pokémon titles, Pokémon Conquest will initially feel a bit foreign. Despite the seemingly overwhelming quantity of things to do, however, it's not terribly difficult to get into. When the game begins, you take control of the youthful Warlord (you pick the gender) of the Aurora nation. Your ultimate objective, much like those in the

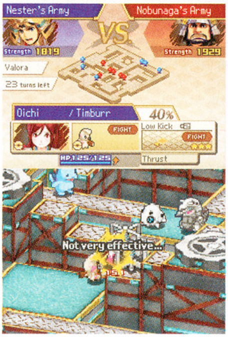

Nester's Army
Strength 389
Terrera
10 turns left
Terumoto / Cottonee
39%
GRASS
Absorb
GRASS
HP 79/ 79
Mountaineer
62
58
Fight
Wait
Link
79
67
56
Back

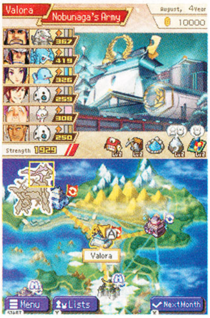

Nester's Army
Nobunaga's Army
VS.
Strength 1819
Strength 1929
Valora
25 turns left

I'll show you what I'm made of!



[Above] That blue field around Gallade indicates its range of movement. Proper positioning of your Pokémon before attacking is a key to victory.

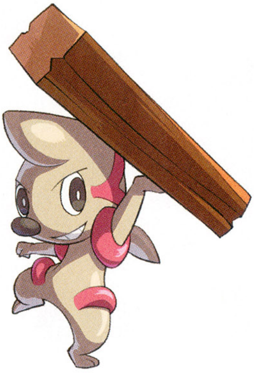




Nobunaga's Ambition titles, is to travel to other nations, recruit fellow Warlords, conquer enemy castles, and unite Ransei. Unfortunately, Nobunaga and his army have the same goal as you do.

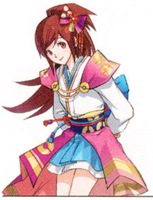
Instead of wandering around a map, you move by simply choosing the nation to which you wish to travel. Within each nation, you can engage in a variety of activities, including the aforementioned castle-conquering. There are shops to visit, areas where you can bolster your forces by fighting and recruiting new Warlords, opportunities to enhance the bond between you and your Pokémon, and more. You can even delegate responsibility to the Warlords stationed in any castles under your control. This allows for continued army-building without the need for constant involvement on your part.

Choose your moves carefully, though; each Warlord under your command is allowed only one action per turn (denoted as a month of in-game time). If you've not experienced strategy RPGs before, these basic mechanics might seem limiting at first. After a few turns, though, you begin to appreciate the strategic elements behind those limitations. It forces you to think about your troops and their



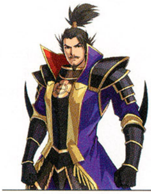
Meet the Warlords

One of the coolest aspects of Pokémon Conquest is that it takes inspiration from Japanese history. Although the Warlords in the game may not have truly battled with Pokémon, they did lead interesting lives.



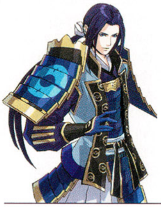
OICHI

She and her Jigglypuff appear in Pokémon Conquest as your partners. In a shocking twist (for those unfamiliar with feudal Japan), Oichi is revealed to be Nobunaga's younger sister. In real life she married her brother's rival, Azai Nagamasa, after the two formed an alliance.



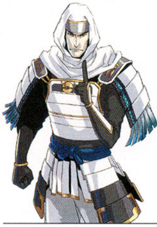
ODA NOBUNAGA

Pokémon Conquest's main antagonist is legendary for being a fierce and brutal military leader. Nobunaga had conquered about a third of Japan when he committed ritual suicide in 1582 after Akechi Mitsuhide betrayed him.



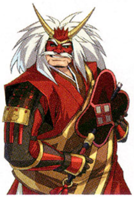
AKECHI MITSUHIDE

Although Mitsuhide served as a general under Nobunaga, he led his army to attack Nobunaga while the military leader was resting at a temple. The attack forced Nobunaga to suicide, but Mitsuhide paid for his betrayal when Toyotomi Hideyoshi killed him 13 days later.



UESUGI KENSHIN

Kenshin was called the god of war by his followers, and he had a well-known rivalry with Takeda Shingen. When Nobunaga began his rise to power, Kenshin's military planning led him to victory against Nobunaga's army. Kenshin, however, was in poor health, and died before he could fully move against Nobunaga.

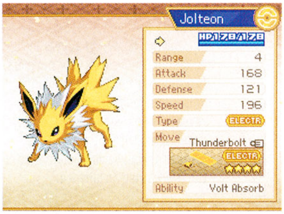


TAKEDA SHINGEN

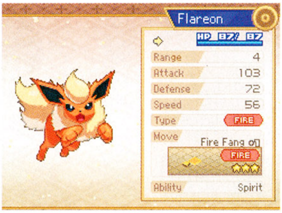
In his early 20s, Shingen took control of his family clan and began conquering nearby provinces. As his strength grew, he found a fierce opponent in Uesugi Kenshin. He was eventually seen as the only man capable of defeating Nobunaga, but he died mysteriously before he could make such an attempt.

Eevee-lution

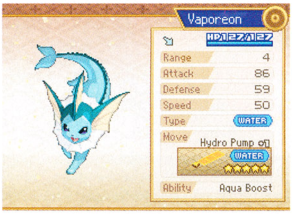
Your character begins Pokémon Conquest with an Eevee partner. Like all Eevee, yours has the ability to evolve into various forms. A few hours into the game, you will receive three stones that can be used to evolve your fuzzy friend. It's a good opportunity to flesh out your army with an elemental type that you might be missing. But choose wisely: there's no going back.


Jolteon
HP 178/178
Range 4
Attack 168
Defense 121
Speed 196
Type ELECTR
Move Thunderbolt ELECTR
Ability Volt Absorb

THUNDER STONE
Evolves Eevee Into: Jolteon
Strong Against: Water-type, Flying-type
Weak Against: Electric-type, Grass-type, Dragon-type


Flareon
HP 87/87
Range 4
Attack 103
Defense 72
Speed 56
Type FIRE
Move Fire Fang FIRE
Ability Spirit

FIRE STONE
Evolves Eevee Into: Flareon
Strong Against: Grass-type, Ice-type, Bug-type, Steel-type
Weak Against: Fire-type, Water-type, Rock-type, Dragon-type

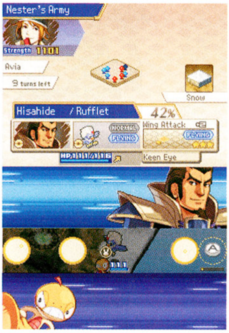

Vaporeon
HP 127/127
Range 4
Attack 86
Defense 59
Speed 50
Type WATER
Move Hydro Pump WATER
Ability Aqua Boost

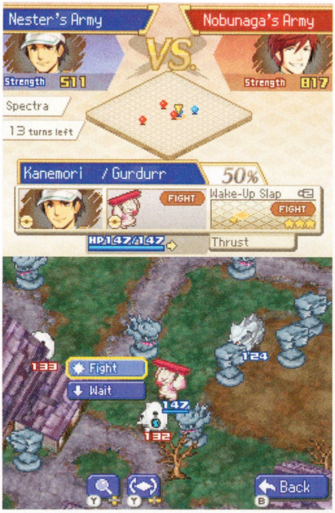
WATER STONE
Evolves Eevee Into: Vaporeon
Strong Against: Fire-type, Ground-type, Rock-type
Weak Against: Water-type, Grass-type, Dragon-type

actions each turn. Deciding if you want to charge ahead into battle, spend time resting to build your strength, go shopping, or engage in various other activities requires planning, and your choices can have consequences that will affect you for multiple turns.

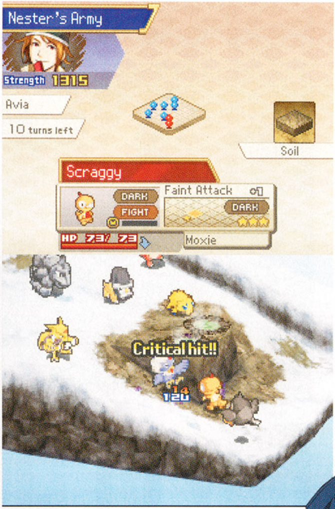
All of your decisions ultimately lead to you engaging in battles, both to recruit new Warlords and their Pokémon and to claim castles. These fights are where you'll be spending the bulk of your play time, so it's a good thing they're so engaging. Each conflict is like an elaborate chess match in which you must constantly adjust your tactics based on your opponents' moves. Also like in chess, you'll learn to think several moves ahead and determine ways to place yourself in an advantageous position while forcing the enemy into a trap.

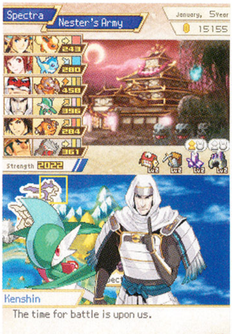
During the matches, standard Pokémon type rules apply, so you'll certainly want to bring, say, Water-type Pokémon to a castle that's filled with Fire-types. But even with a type advantage, you can still be thwarted by the battlefield itself. Most maps contain elements that can change, such as bridges that appear and disappear and gates that open and close with the flip of a switch. Hazards like lava, fire, and poison litter some fields, but Pokémon that share a given hazard's elemental type needn't worry about it. These randomized play conditions add an extra level of intensity to each stage, making things far more interesting. The Pokémon can utilize abilities, as in other Pokémon titles, and each Warlord also has a special skill that can be used once per battle. These skills have effects such as boosting



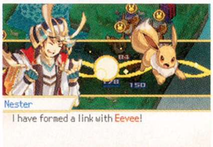

Nester's Army
Nobunaga's Army
VS.
Strength 511
Strength 817
Spectra
13 turns left
Kanemori / Gurdurr
50%
FIGHT
Wake-Up Slap
FIGHT
HP 147/147
Thrust
133
Fight
Wait
124
147
132
Back

[Above] This spooky graveyard is full of statues that move on their own.


Nester's Army
Strength 1315
Avia
10 turns left
Soil
Scraggy
DARK
FIGHT
Faint Attack
DARK
HP 73/ 73
Moxie
Critical hit!!
14
124


Spectra
Nester's Army
January, 5Year
15155
243
280
458
396
284
361
Strength 2022
Kenshin

The time for battle is upon us.



I have formed a link with Eevee!

your Pokémon's stats, increasing their movement range, or restoring hit points.

With so many variables in play, there are countless ways to approach each fight. Between the many types of Pokémon, their abilities, the changing battlefields, your Warlords' skills, and all of the troop organization and between-conflict activity, the battles are remarkably deep, and each victory feels well-earned.

As enjoyable as Pokémon Conquest is, though, there are a few areas where it suffers due to the nature of the strategy RPG genre. The turn-based battles tend to move at a sluggish pace, with turns often being used to simply move your Pokémon across the battlefield without really interacting with the opponent. Enemy engagements can also last for quite a while. A round can end up occupying half an hour or more, but fortunately there is the option to save in the middle of a match. Still, it can be awfully frustrating to lose a long battle and be forced to restart it after adjusting your strategy. Young players who are acclimated to the fast-paced fighting in the mainline Pokémon series may occasionally lose patience with these prolonged skirmishes.

Once you've gotten used to the game's pace, however, Pokémon Conquest is a load of fun and very rewarding. This seemingly random pairing of Pokémon and Japanese history works way better than it has any right to, and the lengthy adventure will keep you involved right up until the end (and past it, thanks to ample post-main-game content). This may not be the Pokémon adventure you expect, but it's definitely one worth playing. —PHIL T.

DS
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **TECMO KOEI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Pokémon Password

2rz3XFCKmR

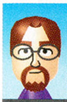
Do you have trouble making tough decisions? Like, say, choosing which evolutionary form you want for your starter Eevee? Well, thanks to Pokémon Conquest's password feature, you needn't worry about such things. Input the above password, and during the next in-game month, a swarm of adorable Eevees will appear somewhere in the Ransei Region. Instead of battling them, use the Link option during the match to befriend as many of them as you can. Behold! Now you can have an entire team comprised of Eevee variants. Just act quickly—the Eevee will be around for only one turn, and the password cannot be used a second time.

WRITERS' BLOCK

IF YOU COULD ADD ONE MORE GAME TO THE LIST OF Wii ESSENTIALS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

JUSTIN CHENG

Wii Sports Resort. Not only did it demonstrate what was possible with the Wii MotionPlus accessory, but it was also just plain fun.



CHRIS HOFFMAN

A Boy and His Blob. If you like 2D graphics and cinema-quality animation, this one is a must-play. Plus, it has a hug button—adorable!

CODY MARTIN

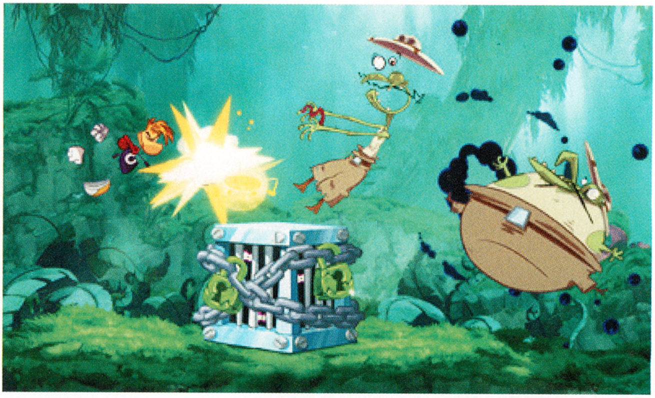
Resident Evil 4. Even if you've already played the game on other consoles, the motion controls and the ability to aim with the Wii Remote make it worth saving Ashley all over again.

PHIL THEOBALD

I would have included Wario Land: Shake It! I feel that this great platformer is often overlooked, and it features positively gorgeous hand-drawn graphics.

STEVE THOMASON

Reviews were mixed, but I loved NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams. Is it as great as the Sega Saturn original? No, but it's still a wonderful experience.



Ray of Light

RAYMAN ORIGINS

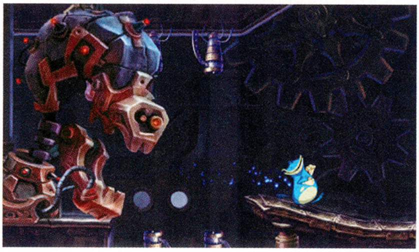
8.5 Rayman Origins for the Wii console is a masterpiece. We've extolled it extensively in this fine publication: it scored a 9.5, garnered two 2011 Nintendo Power Awards, and in this very issue is deemed an essential Wii title. If you haven't played it yet...well, shame on you. But you're in luck: Ubisoft has provided another opportunity for you to experience the magic with Rayman Origins for the Nintendo 3DS system.

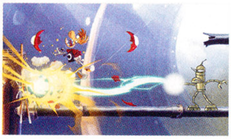
I had a blast returning to the game's wacky world. The combination of tight controls, outstanding level design, a catchy soundtrack, and gorgeous hand-drawn graphics make for an all-around amazing platforming experience. Naturally, one advantage the N3DS version has is the 3D effect, which gives everything a nice sense of depth. However, a little was lost in translation from Wii to the stereoscopic handheld: the frame rate sometimes feels less than solid, and the fidelity of both the visuals and the audio (regardless of whether you're wearing headphones) are not as crisp as they are in the Wii game.

These issues aren't dealbreakers, though; the overall product is still entertaining. Of course, it would have been even more so had this version of Rayman Origins included its sibling's marvelous multiplayer. Unfortunately, this is a single-player-only affair, so not only are you unable to share the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat with friends, but you also don't have any backup. You could experiment a bit when platforming or picking up collectibles in the Wii edition, comfortable in the knowledge that your buddies would be able to revive you if you made a stupid mistake and vice versa. Not so in this title. If it's any consolation, this game allows you to compare your progress with other Rayman Origins players via StreetPass.

Ultimately, I had loads of fun with Rayman Origins for N3DS. Just because it didn't reach the bar set by the Wii version doesn't mean the title isn't great—after all, the bar was set so high that very few games could touch it. —**JUSTIN C.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTPELLIER**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

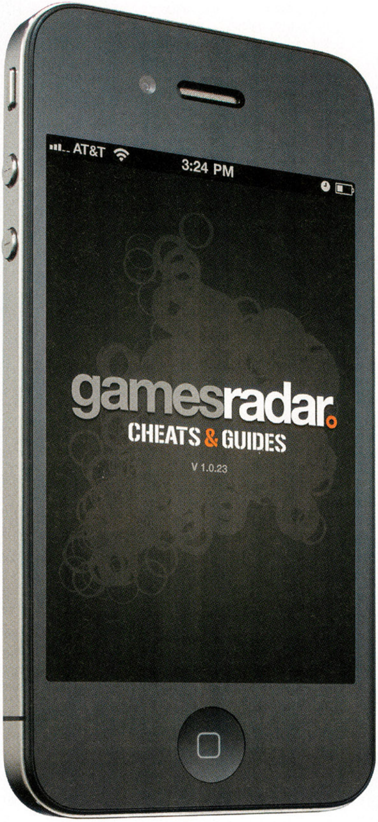




“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz



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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

THE COMPLETE LIST OF NINTENDO POWER REVIEWS FROM THE PAST YEAR

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS

Nintendo 3DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy	7.5	Namco Bandai	273	T
Bit.Trip Saga	8.0	Aksys	271	E
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II	8.5	Aksys	268	T
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.0	Sega	273	T
Cave Story 3D	8.0	NIS America	273	E10+
Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+
Cooking Mama 4: Kitchen Magic	5.0	Majesco	273	E
Crush 3D	7.0	Sega	275	E10+
Cubic Ninja	4.0	Ubisoft	268	E
Deca Sports Extreme	5.0	Konami	271	E
Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights	6.5	Konami	272	E10+
Driver Renegade	3.0	Ubisoft	271	M
Dual Pen Sports	7.0	Namco Bandai	270	E10+
Face Racers: Photo Finish	4.0	Majesco	271	E
FIFA Soccer 12	7.0	EA Sports	272	E
Frogger 3D	6.5	Konami	271	E
Funky Barn 3D	6.0	Ubisoft	276	E
Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D	5.5	Natsume	271	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns 3D	7.5	Natsume	272	E
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	5.0	Ubisoft	273	T
Kid Icarus: Uprising	9.5	Nintendo	277	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	9.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	275	E
Mario Kart 7	9.0	Nintendo	274	E
Mario Tennis Open	7.0	Nintendo	278	E
Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	9.0	Konami	276	M
Michael Jackson: The Experience	5.0	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Nano Assault	7.0	Majesco	273	E10+
Nikoli's Pencil Puzzle	6.0	Konami	272	E
Order Up!!	6.5	UTV Ignition	275	E
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	7.0	Namco Bandai	269	E10+
Pac-Man Party 3D	4.5	Namco Bandai	273	E
Pet Zombies	5.5	Majesco	272	T
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection 3D	7.0	Crave	268	E10+
Pokémon Rumble Blast	7.5	Nintendo	273	E
Reel Fishing Paradise 3D	6.0	Natsume	269	E
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	7.5	Capcom	269	M
Resident Evil: Revelations	9.0	Capcom	275	M
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D	5.5	Atari	278	E
Shifting World	6.5	Aksys	277	E
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	9.0	Atlus	271	T
Shinobi	7.5	Sega	273	T
The Sims 3 Pets	7.5	Electronic Arts	273	T
Sonic Generations	8.0	Sega	274	E
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.0	Activision	273	T
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	7.0	Nintendo	277	T
Star Fox 64 3D	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Super Mario 3D Land	9.0	Nintendo	273	E
Tales of the Abyss	7.0	Namco Bandai	275	T
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	7.5	Namco Bandai	276	T
Tetris Axis	7.5	Nintendo	272	E
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	272	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	4.0	Activision	270	E10+
WWE All Stars	7.5	THQ	274	T

MORE ON:

SHINOBI

Despite the crazy ninja antics and nonstop action, I wasn't enjoying Shinobi as much as I thought I would. I finally figured out why: since you're penalized for using the coolest moves (ninja magic and the kunai spread), I wasn't using them in combat. Once I stopped caring about the negative impact on my score and went all-out, I had a lot more fun. —CHRIS H.

MORE ON:

SAMURAI WARRIORS: CHRONICLES

Playing Pokémon Conquest this month put me in a mood to go back and play another game starring Japan's historical warlords. Samurai Warriors: Chronicles is far more action-packed than its strategic cousin, allowing you to slice through armies of enemy soldiers. The multiple midbattle missions and ability to switch between four different warriors keeps the fight frantic and ensures that you're constantly on the move. —PHIL T.

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
The Adventures of Tintin: The Game	5.5	Ubisoft	275	E10+
Back to the Future: The Game	6.5	Telltale	273	T
Bit.Trip Complete	9.0	Aksys	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.5	Sega	270	T
Cars 2: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	269	E10+
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	6.0	Crave	274	E10+

Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+
Disney Universe	4.5	Disney	273	E10+
Driver San Francisco	4.5	Ubisoft	271	T
Epic Mickey	8.5	Disney	263	E
FIFA Soccer 12	8.0	EA Sports	272	E
Fishing Resort	7.5	Xseed	273	E
Fortune Street	7.5	Nintendo	274	E
Go Vacation	7.0	Namco Bandai	273	E10+
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Kung Fu Panda 2	2.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	9.5	Nintendo	274	E10+
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	268	E10+
Lost In Shadow	8.0	Hudson	263	E10+
Madden NFL 12	7.0	Electronic Arts	271	E
Major League Baseball 2K12	2.5	2K Sports	277	E
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	273	E
Mario Party 9	8.0	Nintendo	276	E
Mario Sports Mix	8.0	Nintendo	264	E
Mystery Case Files: The Malgrave Incident	6.0	Nintendo	269	E
NASCAR 2011: The Game	3.0	Activision	269	E
PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond	5.5	Nintendo	276	E
Rayman Origins	9.5	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Rhythm Heaven Fever	8.0	Nintendo	276	E
Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny	8.0	Natsume	272	E10+
Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	7.0	Activision	273	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	7.0	Activision	273	T
Super Mario All-Stars	9.0	Nintendo	263	E
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution—Battle Grids	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
Wii Play: Motion	7.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
Worms: Battle Islands	7.0	THQ	264	E10+
WWE '12	6.5	THQ	274	T
X-Men Destiny	2.5	Activision	273	T
Xenoblade Chronicles	9.0	Nintendo	277	T

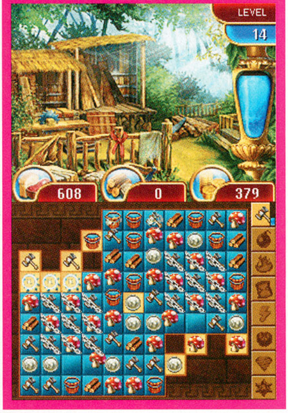
Nintendo DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Aliens: Infestation	8.0	Sega	272	T
ATV Wild Ride	7.0	Destineer	264	E
Bejeweled 3	8.5	PopCap	274	E
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	5.0	Majesco	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	3.5	Sega	270	E10+
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	7.5	Nintendo	265	T
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Nintendo	271	E
Fossil Fighters: Champions	8.0	Nintendo	273	E
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	9.0	Capcom	263	T
Giana Sisters DS	9.0	Destineer	265	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	3.5	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns DS	8.0	Natsume	272	E
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded	8.0	Square Enix	263	E10+
Kirby Mass Attack	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Kung Fu Panda 2	4.5	THQ	268	E10+
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble	6.0	Tomy	264	T
Plants vs. Zombies	9.0	PopCap	264	E10+
Professor Layton and the Last Specter	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2	8.0	Atlus	276	T
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter	9.0	Xseed	271	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	5.0	Activision	273	E10+
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Autobots/Decepticons	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
X-Men Destiny	2.0	Activision	273	E10+

MORE ON:

CRADLE OF ROME 2

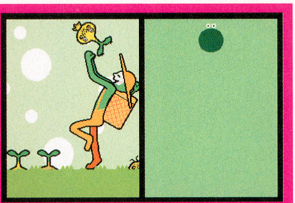
There are a lot of Bejeweled-style puzzlers on the market these days, but Cradle of Rome 2 stands out from the pack due to its interesting premise. See, as the one in charge of founding the city of Rome, you have to match at least three icons in order to collect resources (gold or food, for example), which are used to purchase structures. It's a cool idea that gives you some incentive to keep playing. —JUSTIN C.



MORE ON:

RHYTHM HEAVEN

In honor of Rhythm Heaven Fever's recent release, I decided to try my hand at its DS predecessor. Your rhythm is put to the test by tapping, flicking, and swiping the stylus to the beat of each cute and quirky minigame. The challenges can be tough at first, but they're a lot of fun once you get the hang of the pace and find your inner rhythm. Although I prefer Fever's button-based controls over using the stylus, there's a lot of charm here. —CODY M.



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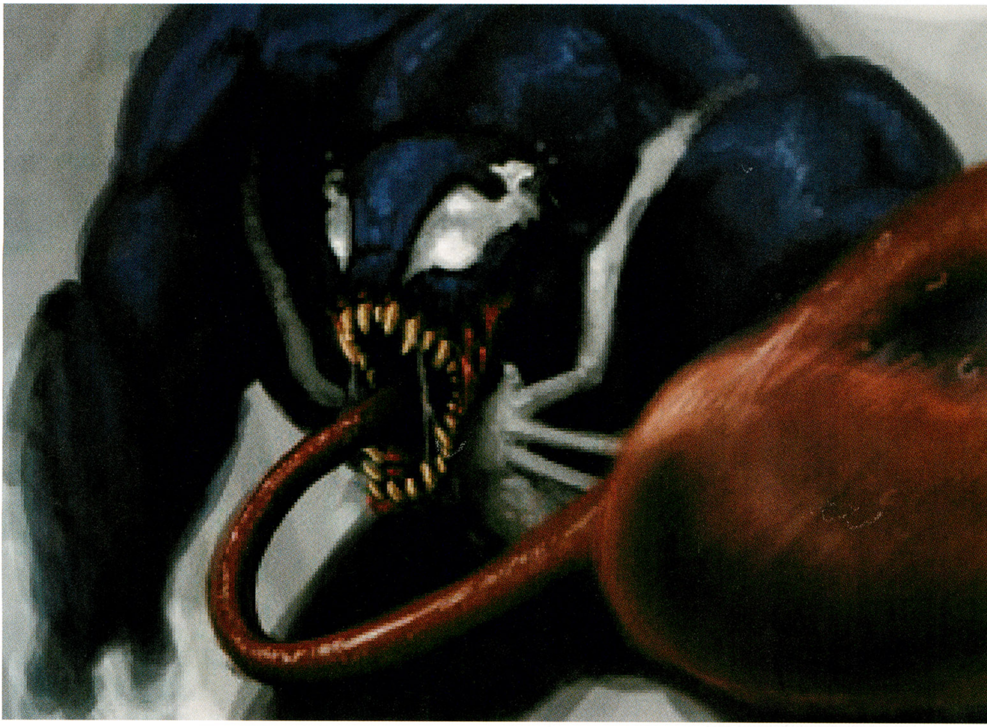
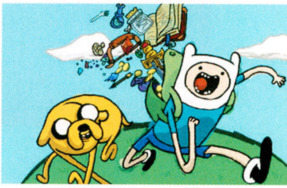


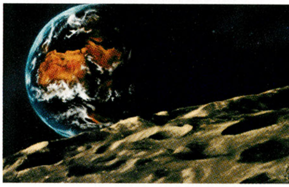
FANDOM

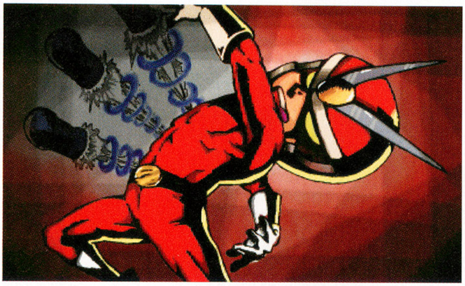
Show Your Colors

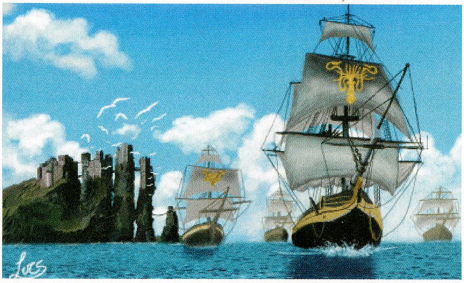
Skilled illustrators create stunning artwork in Colors! 3D.

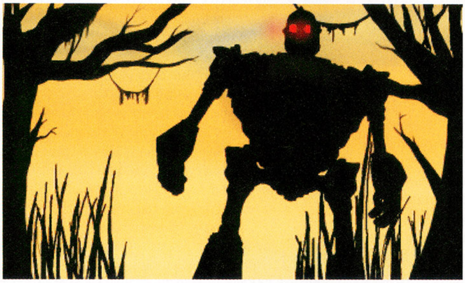
WE LOVE messing around with Colors! 3D for Nintendo 3DS, but the harsh reality is that when it comes to drawing, our creations are more akin to the scrawls on the back of a school notebook than to Renaissance masterpieces. Luckily, there are scores of talented artists out there to show us how to get the most out of Colors! 3D; in the title's online gallery mode, we're able to check out what other people have been drawing. Sure, there are lots of lame "here's my friend code!" pieces littering the gallery, but there are plenty of awe-inspiring creations that look as though they've been painted on a canvas. We've scoured the gallery, and chosen some of our favorite drawings to showcase. **—PHIL T.**



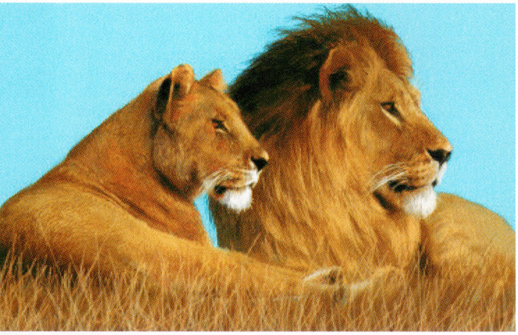








As impressive as these works of art are, the real treat is watching them being drawn in real time. Colors! 3D records the artist's brush strokes, allowing you to play back and study their drawing techniques. Learn from the masters!



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your best
SHOT

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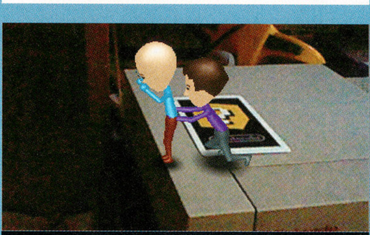
Use your Nintendo DSi or Nintendo 3DS system to snap a fun, gaming-related photo that matches this month's theme, then transfer the image to a computer using an SD card reader and e-mail it to the above address. We'll print the best ones.

THIS MONTH'S THEME: FINAL EXAMS

VOLUME 277'S THEME: APRIL FOOLS' DAY



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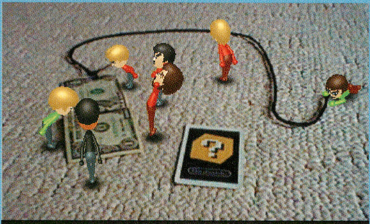

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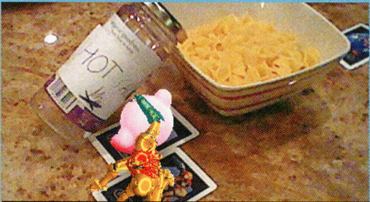

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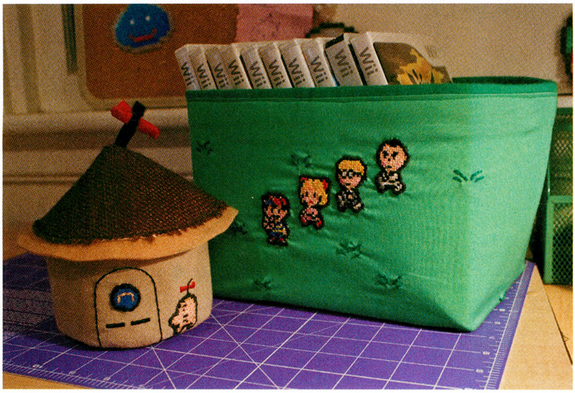


FANDOM

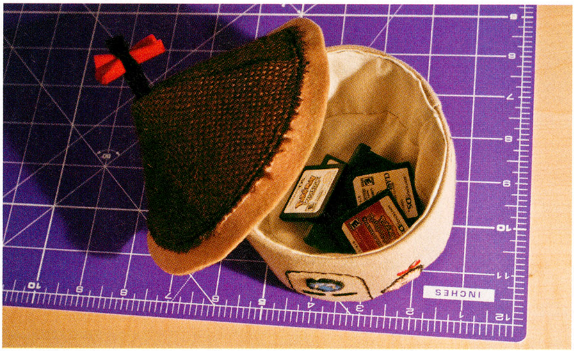
Home Sweet Home

Mr. Saturn's stitch-perfect abode is awfully inviting.

EARTHBOUND has proven itself as a classic; it came out in 1995, and players are still poring over and paying homage to every charming aspect of the Super NES RPG. The latest comes from Denver's Virginia Hagans, who chose to immortalize Mr. Saturn's quirky flying-saucer-looking hut with embroidery floss and stabilizer (supersturdy felt). Why did she choose to make that of all things in the game?

"Mr. Saturn is one of those characters that not everyone is very familiar with but because of games like Smash Bros., everyone has seen him around," she explains. "His village in EarthBound was charming, and I thought the houses would be a great way to store stuff on my desk without making it look like I'm storing stuff."

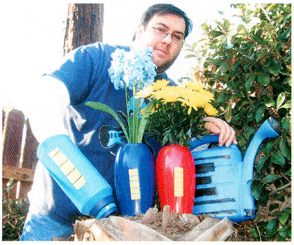
That's right: in addition to it looking particularly snazzy, the house's roof pops off for Virginia to store stacks and stacks of DS games. It goes nicely with an organization bin she made featuring Ness, Paula, Jeff, and Poo trekking through a grassy area. The bin is large enough to hold just over a dozen Wii games. Or if you were Mr. Saturn, it would probably be just big enough to double as a picnic basket to stash a lunch of peanut cheese bars and piggy jelly. **—DAVID W.**



FANDOM

A Blue Bomber by Any Other Name

One man proves caring for flowers can be mega manly.

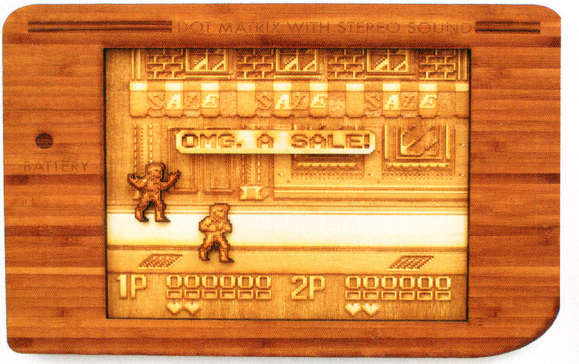


WHAT IF MEGA MAN were hiding a green thumb inside his arm cannons? The result would probably be something like what Jonathan Bilski of Los Angeles, California, has whipped up: two amazing flower vases styled after Mega Man and Proto Man's Mega Busters.

Bilski, who also runs game-fan site Things to Do in LA (www.ttdila.com), says it was just his way of giving back to Capcom and thanking the company for all it has done for the gaming community in LA. "I haven't seen a game company do as many different events as them," gushes Bilski. "I found vases that resembled Mega Busters at some arts-and-crafts store, the idea popped into my head, and I heard boss music."

He also recruited the help of his friend, professional artist Sky Burchard (he's done tons of Zelda tribute pieces), for guidance on assembling these bad boys. Among the clever ideas they cooked up was to turn a blue watering can into an E-Tank.

Bilski went to three different nurseries to find the proper flowers to complement the vases and pay homage to Mega Man. The Blue Bomber's vase has light-blue azaleas, which correspond to Dr. Light, whereas Proto's Man's has yellow hydrangeas to represent his basic energy attacks. **—DAVID W.**



FANDOM

A Game Boy to Pine for

One man armed with lasers and lumber pays tribute to Double Dragon II.

THANKS TO the Nintendo 3DS eShop and the Wii Shop Channel, there's no shortage of ways to check out your old favorite games using new technology. But what about seeing an old favorite on really old technology? Aled Lewis of London, England, has concocted an 11 ½" × 8 ¾" wooden replica of the Game Boy screen with a screen capture from the classic beat-'em-up Double Dragon II carved right into it.

Lewis had some help creating this piece—titled Double Discount—thanks to his friend Joe Van Wetering's laser cutter, which was obtained through Kickstarter. Lewis donated to the cause with the understanding that he could make this piece as a reward. After some trial and error, Lewis emerged with a laser-perfect wooden scene from Double Dragon II, framed by the familiar Game Boy bezel.

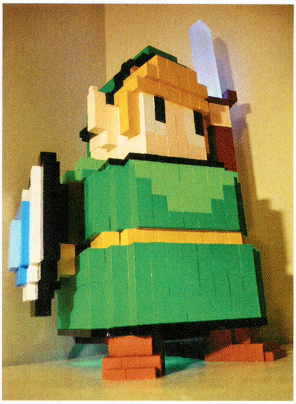
"Double Dragon II one of my favorite childhood titles. My brother and I…played as Billy and Jimmy and cleaned up the mean streets together," Lewis remembers. "The scene I picked is actually the first screen of the game. The idea of one of these tough bros being distracted by a sale before the mission had even got underway just amused me." —**DAVID W.**

Seeing this piece makes us wonder what other wooden handhelds would look like.

MOD JOB

A Link to the PC

Stacks of wooden blocks begat another stellar computer case.

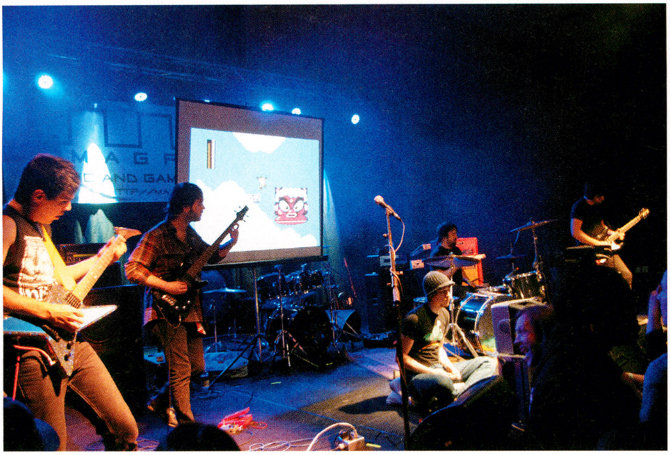


RICHARD CLINTON seems to have the market cornered on creating amazing custom PCs with a pixel-based look using scads of wooden blocks, having wowed us in the past with Black and White Mage cases from Final Fantasy, along with a Super Mushroom from the Mario series. For his latest creation, the 25-year-old boiler operator from Boardman, Ohio, decided to pay tribute to a formative game from his childhood—The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past on Super NES.

Link represented the first 16-bit sprite Clinton had turned into a block-based computer, which he says "made it more difficult to visualize him in the real world and how he should look from each angle" compared to past 8-bit subjects. After a couple of initial drafts, he decided to give Link a light-up sword, which he crafted from a plastic rectangle. With the plans set, he started gluing together the numerous square bricks, and the entire project took about six weeks of pretty constant work. And like his previous creations, it's a fully working computer—just wholly unlike any PC you've seen before.

Clinton says he's started working on commissioned cases for others, as well as custom phone-charging stands based on 8-bit characters. He's considering a Pokémon character for his next personal computer project, though, and you can follow his myriad creations at facebook.com/8bitbuilder.

—ANDREW H.



Bit Brigade takes video game-music covers to a whole new level.

FANDOM

NES on Stage

Forget lead singer—this rad 8-bit cover band is rocking a lead NES-player.

THANKS IN PART to trailblazers like Minibosses and The Advantage, the game-music cover scene has grown exponentially in recent years. Now loads of bands are throwing down awesome live versions of popular 8-bit classics. But Bit Brigade does things a little differently. Rather than playing just individual tunes, this group of NES-enthusiast rockers from Athens, Georgia, is known for shredding through entire 8-bit soundtracks onstage while one member plays the game from start to finish on a giant projector screen in the background. It's amazing to watch.

"I went through a phase in 2004 where I wanted to beat every NES game that I couldn't beat when I was a kid," recalls guitarist Bryant Williamson. The inspiration for Bit Brigade struck during a late night Contra play session. Williamson rallied a few bandmates and immediately got in touch with fellow Nintendo fan Noah McCarthy. "[I] knew that he spent most of his time playing games," says Williamson. "He was our guy."

Once assembled, the group set out to master Contra—the musicians learning all of the music and McCarthy fine-tuning his speed runs through the game—before moving on to tackle Mega Man 2, Ninja Gaiden, and Castlevania 3. The band usually rocks through a particular game for a few gigs at a time before switching it up. "I have essentially spent my entire life practicing for this band," jokes McCarthy, who got hooked on Super Mario Bros. at a young age and has been an avid gamer ever since. "Learning these games is really fun for me. It's like I have some weird achievement that I'm trying to reach to be able to perform the game with the band."

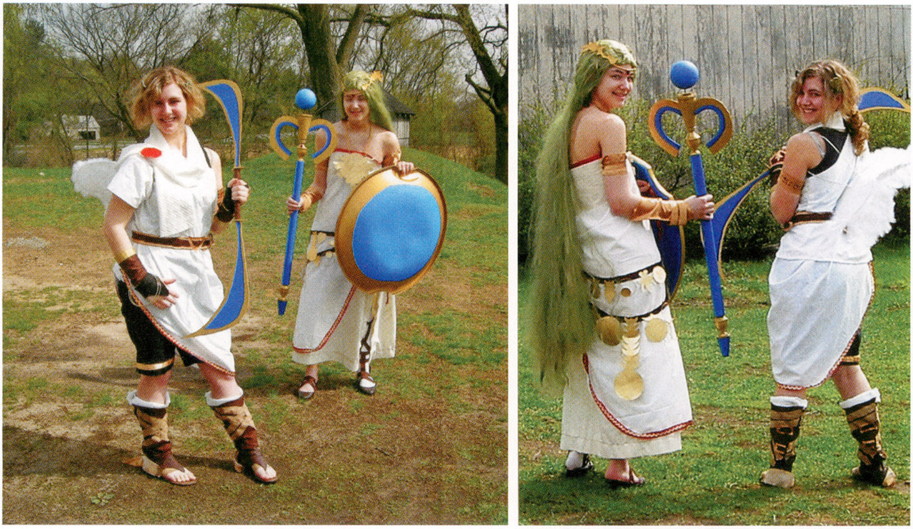
Bit Brigade's live performances are intense for both the band and the crowd. Executing the complicated musical arrangements is tough on its own, Williamson explains, and maintaining the focus required to turn on a dime and transition songs in perfect timing with the gameplay itself is tricky too. Yet somehow these guys make it look effortless.

McCarthy is to Bit Brigade what a lead singer might be to other bands, so his role in the group is equally important to that of his musical comrades. Anxiety sets in before each gig, but being onstage is a Zenlike experience. "I get into a very calm and collected state while performing. That's the time I look forward to," he says, adding that it's a blast playing games in front of so many people.

"Our audiences are incredibly attentive to Noah's gameplay," notes Williamson. "They are all pushing and cheering for Noah's victory, but are, at times, ridden with anxiety and concern that he will die. In the end, when Noah finally beats the game, it is a victory for everyone in the room."

Scope out www.bitbrigade.com for upcoming show dates and to see what the band is up to! **—NATHAN M.**

PHOTOS BY MIKE WHITE



It's awesome that sisters Rachel and Linzie Genovesi got their parents and grandmother involved in the costume-making process.

COSPLAY

Launch Team

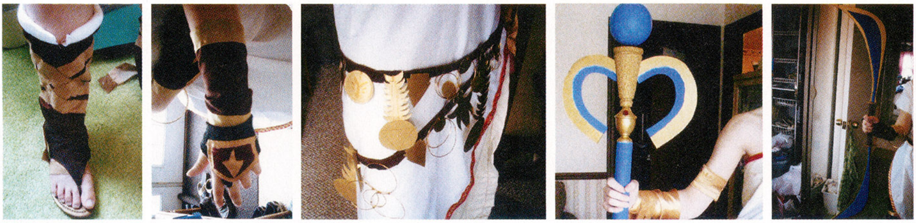
Crafting these cool Kid Icarus costumes was a family effort.

CONSIDERING how much focus and dedication it takes to come up with a way to transform yourself into your favorite game character, creative cosplay is often an individual pursuit. But sisters Rachel and Linzie Genovesi of Mishawaka, IN, were so pumped about the release of Kid Icarus: Uprising on N3DS that they recruited their whole family to help make these cool Pit and Lady Palutena costumes in celebration of the game's launch.

"We're huge Kid Icarus fans," explains Rachel. "Pit is my favorite video game character of all time. Way back when we heard that Kid Icarus was finally coming back (and that Mr. Sakurai was heading the project, no less), we knew we had to do something special. So we started working on costumes."

Knowing they needed a few helping hands to pull off their spectacular project to perfection, the pair enlisted the aid of their grandmother Mary and their mother Kim to pitch in with some of the sewing duties. Rachel sewed everything else and Linzie did much of the painting and assisted with accessories. On weapons and wig duty, their father Armand assembled the bow and staff and helped airbrush Palutena's long green hairpiece. Now that's serious teamwork. Frankly, we're touched to see such an awesome family-wide collaboration, and their collective effort really shows in the little details of each costume.

However, making the Pit and Palutena ensembles was only half of their master plan. Donning their newly crafted hero attire, the sisters trekked out on launch day to show off their threads and pick up their own copies of Uprising to dig into. "When we showed up to our local GameStop, the employees and other customers were delighted," recalls Rachel. "We had so much fun and are seriously enjoying the new game." **—NATHAN M.**



PHOTOS OF RACHEL AND LINZIE GENOVESI BY LORI REA

JULY 2012 VOL. 280

NEXT MONTH

The next generation of Nintendo video gaming draws ever closer! Wii U is poised to redefine the interactive entertainment landscape, and we'll have all the latest facts and details, so don't miss out! We'll also deliver loads of news and previews on the hottest upcoming games, as well as toe-tapping reviews and another wild ride on the way-back machine.

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POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to: Nintendo Power, PO Box 5770, Harlan, IA 51593-1270. Standard Mail Enclosure in the following editions: None. Ride-Along Enclosure in the following editions: None. Returns: Pitney Bowes, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, Your Knitting Life, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, PC Gamer and Windows: The Official Magazine. Entire contents copyright 2012, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in Nintendo Power. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of Nintendo Power. Products named in the pages of Nintendo Power are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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